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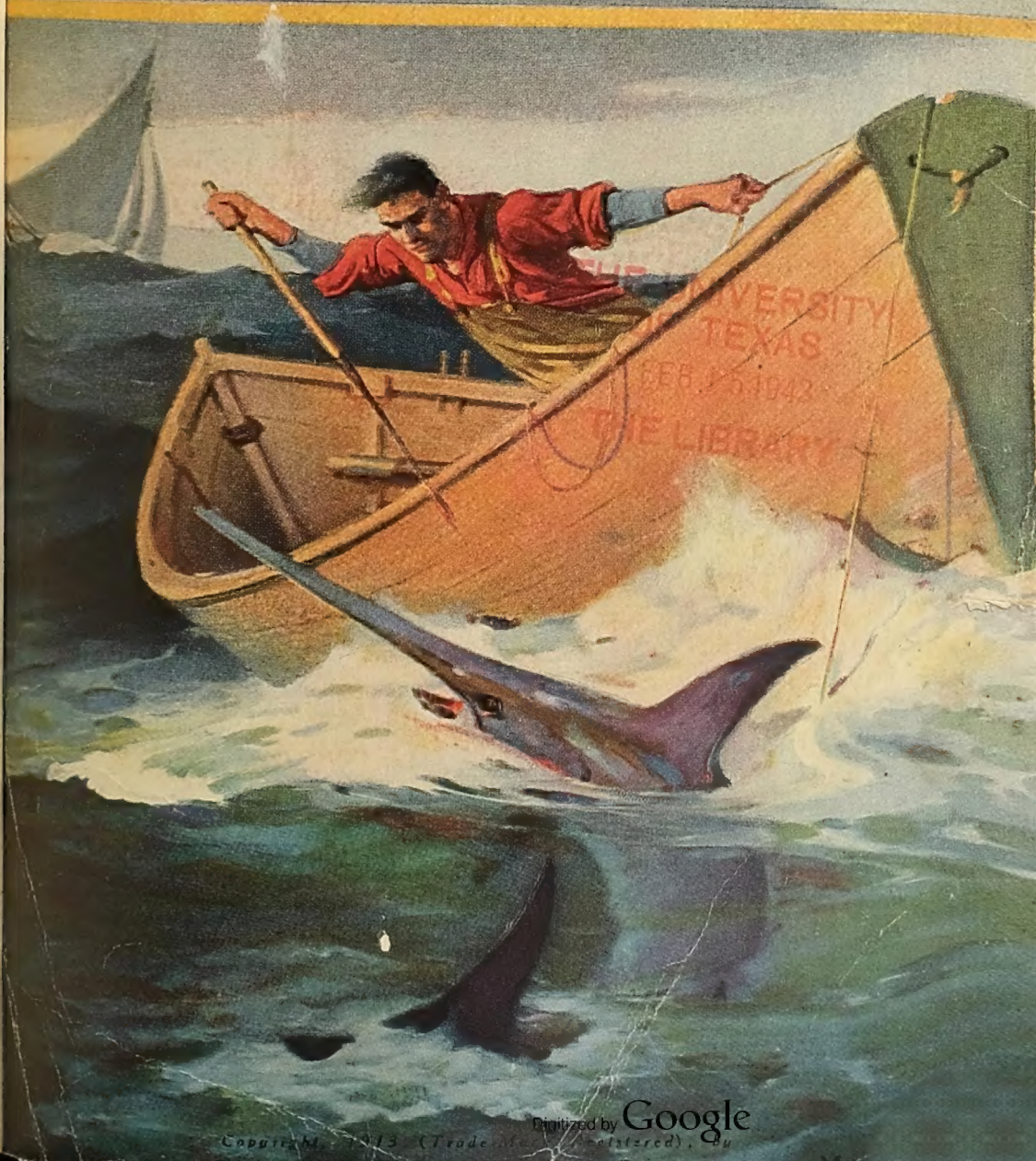

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ADVENTURE

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN MANAGING EDITOR

VOLUME 6 NUMBER 1

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A LINE from one of our "Camp-Fire" members living—at least I hope he is still living, for things have sort of heated up around him since he wrote—in one of the republics to the south of us:

. . . . but we have been cut off here by the *revoltos*, and I am very doubtful if I will ship my household possessions up until the —— Government has disbanded. We have been in the hands of the rebels for some days, and one of the mines was looted —even the ore on the dumps was carried away.

Coming over here I met the Señor Don ——— ——— ——— in ———. He was sampling the *tequila* at The Cantina of the Ten Thousand Lost Souls, and I talked to him. He told me the story of the massacre of the three hundred and twenty-eight Chinese by the ——ists, last May. We talked it over for three hours, going to the Sign of the Restaurant and Hotel of the Golden Lion; but we finished up in The Cantina of the Second Reunion of the Seven Friends, where the *tequila* was to the liking of the Don. There, in the court, surrounded by banana-plants, sipping the raw spirits and eating salt, he told me of the ruthless shooting of Chino children; the ravishing of Chino women and the beating out of the brains of the babies by dashing their heads on the tiled floors of the houses—and it's all true. He told me of the lining seven little girls against a church wall while a drunken *revolto* walked down the line and shot them with a revolver —and much more of this sort—and it can be proved, all of it. If you want that story, I will send it to you, subject to release upon the downfall of the —— Government (which will be in a couple of months), and I will send you photographs of each separate horror.

Very truly yours,

———— ————

THE following letter gives one or two pictures of Mexico over a year ago, written, as you will note, just after Felix Diaz had been arrested after his first attempt at a revolution against Madero:

This morning's paper says that Felix Diaz may be shot—which reminds me of him and Mexico City.

In February, 1911, I was in El Paso with the International Aviators. While there I saw my first real battle, with rebels stretched out in their white cotton suits taking their last sleep—in trying to get some pictures of same I saw my first real jail also —exit, minus one camera, plus some experience.

Count Garibaldi was in town incognito, waiting a chance to slip across the border, which he did a day or two later. My friend, who had a penchant to talk to everybody that looked as if he had a story in him, was talking to the Count, not knowing who he was. He sat blissfully in the plaza at El Paso drawing pictures for the Count of how a Blériot monoplane's landing-gear looked, while Garibaldi reciprocated with his drawings.

It seems that it was all taken in by about a dozen secret agents of the Mexican Government, who promptly made up their mind we were friends and sympathizers of the rebels. When we were leaving Monterey a genial trio of cut-throats got us over in a corner at the station and offered us one thousand dollars gold to go over to Chihuahua on some fool errand, and tried to get us to accept the money—*before them all*. My train was just leaving; besides, I had seen that jail—never would get to spend that money either.

So they told us to go to a certain place when we got to Mexico City and get a letter that would be there. We went, or rather I went—it was near Felix Diaz's house. Well, when I got out of that dark, stone-flagged court, by the concierge, or mozo or whatever he was, I made straight for the lights of Alameda Plaza—and *stayed there*.

In Vera Cruz one night, in a crooked, dark street, I was again approached and sounded, but I didn't *sabe*—deaf and dumb.

We didn't pull off a flight down there on schedule time one day and I did triple time to the Diligencia Hotel with about a thousand behind me chanting "Murder los Gringos"—no, it wasn't a chant either; sounded real pleasant. Met my friend on the road between two gendarmes and the jefe politico. He was yelling for "protection." I knew where my protection was—behind a barred door and one Colt, and I got there.

Very truly yours,

———— ————

JUST by way of hint as to some of the stories in the next issue of ADVENTURE —the June number. Of course we think they're good, or we wouldn't be publishing them, so I'll not enlarge in that direction.

The complete novel is "A Dash of Irish," by W. F. McCaleb and Eugene P. Lyle, Jr., a story of Mexico's war of independence against Spain. The central figure is Don Felix O'Donoju, and if you're as good an Irishman as I am you'll figure it out that he is a descendant of one of those Irish who, driven from their native land by the English invaders, took refuge in Spain and elsewhere on the Continent and attained high place in the lands of their adoption. O'Donoju is the only way a Spaniard could spell O'Donohue or O'Donoghoe. And that "dash of Irish" in Felix's Spanish blood brings strange things to pass.

A new serial, in two parts, begins in June —"The Grenadier," by Donald Francis McGrew. The tale of a strong-jawed young American captain in Mindanao.

A complete novelette, "Red Ned of Remington's," by L. Warburton; "Campbell an' Me an' the B'ar," the first of a number of humorous stories by Frank Houghton, a new member at our Camp-Fire; stories by H. D. Couzens, Talbot Mundy, W. Townend, Edgar Wallace, Hugh Pendexter, and others.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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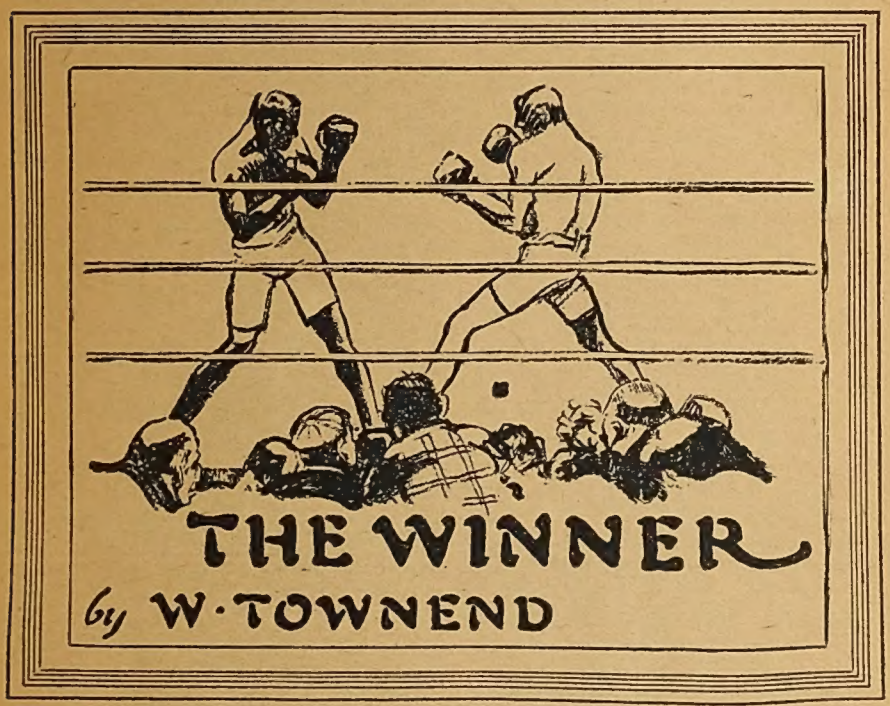

THE WINNER

by W. TOWNEND

EVEN now, I am by no means positive how it all came about; though by reason of my friendship with Sergeant Truscott I know more than most people.

This is the tale:

On a wet November morning I was in the gallery of the garrison gymnasium, watching the various squads at work on the Swedish physical training, which at that time had just been introduced into the British Army. As I stood among the great-coats I looked directly down on a squad of gray-shirted recruits, who were being addressed by their instructor, a small sergeant, whose speech was sorrowful:

"Can't you see what you've got to do? It's no good doin' it anyhow, like a militia reg'ment marchin' past; not a bit. Now please pay partic'ler attention, an' with your eyes open—not shut. See how I do it! Don't think it's any pleasure to me. It ain't. *Now!* Feet astride, harms hupward — stretch! Trunk forward — bend! Slowly, 'oller back—so."

And the small sergeant, a dapper little man with greased hair, achieved the impossible, for I had proved the impossibility of that hollow back often.

At that moment I saw Sergeant Truscott standing easy, trying unostentatiously to catch my eye. I gathered from this that he wished to speak to me, and nodded, for what Sergeant Truscott says is worth hearing.

Sergeant Truscott was attached to the class of non-commissioned officers who were undergoing a preliminary course of instruction before being sent up to Aldershot for

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training; though, as a matter of literal fact, he had received his crossed swords years back and was merely requalifying in the new system.

Soon after, as it was a quarter to eleven, the N.-C. O.'s were dismissed for a fifteen minutes' rest, and I went down-stairs.

Truscott, who was coming out of the changing-room, buttoning up his khaki jacket over his red-and-black-striped jersey, met me in the entrance-hall.

"Mornin', sir," he said cheerfully. "I've got something I'd like to tell you, but——" he hesitated— "it's rather long an'——"

"I'll be down this evening with Captain Severn," I said. "You'll be here then, won't you?"

"Yessir, I will. It bein' only voluntary in the evenin', I have to attend, naturally. That is, as you might say, a hard an' fast rule that may not be broken."

Whereupon Sergeant Truscott departed in search of cocoa and biscuits, well earned.

When I entered the office opposite, Severn glanced up from a large yellow poster that lay on his desk.

Severn, a man of much brawn and muscle, was what is commonly known in the vernacular as "the tame acrobat" in charge; in other words, an Assistant Superintendent of Gymnasia.

"There's some boxing on Monday night," he said. "Remember me telling you about that club that's just been started? You'll come, won't you? It ought to be rather worth seeing, and in any case I've *got* to be there, as a lot of the Tommies have leave to fight, and the General's going, too."

"What'll it be like?" I asked cautiously. I knew these shows of old and had grown wary. "Would you go, if you weren't obliged?"

Thus hoping to make sure.

"Yes, rather. Hard hitting, if nothing else. You will come, won't you?"

"All right, suppose so. You judging or anything?" I realized that resistance was futile.

"Not much," said Severn. "Not if I know it! I'm a mere spectator." He turned to the staff-sergeant. "O Hawker, I'll have the N.-C. O.'s in here next hour for anatomy, instead of gymnastics. Just tell them please." And to me, "You'll have to stop, too, old son. I'm great on the bones and muscles."

II

THAT evening I was in the gymnasium once more, leaning on the gallery-rail and listening to Sergeant Truscott.

"At no other place on earth can so many sights be seen! Lord! I remember that in big letters over the old Aquarium at Westminster, where they used to have the boxing kangaroo and high-diving from the roof. Look! Here you 'ave boxing—of a kind; wrestlin'—or what passes for such—that big gunner's good in his way, all the same—fencin', gymnastics, ball-punchin' and wall-proppin'. Anyhow, did the Captain tell you about the boxin' next Monday night?"

"Yes," said I, "he did. He showed me the poster this morning."

"Well, if you want to see a fight, sir—a real fight, which is not an exhibition spar, but half a dozen fights and a Falls Road wake rolled into one, as you might so put it, you come!"

"Is there anything special on?" said I, in my ignorance, having heard no rumors.

"Special!" said Sergeant Truscott in much amazement. He coughed and lowered his voice impressively. "It's this way; Garnham—you've heard of him, 'aven't you, sir? Joe Garnham and Andy O'Brien, a sergeant in B Company, are going to box sixteen rounds, and it'll be worth seein'. Look here, sir, I'd rather begin at the beginning. What one o' those two fellers does, the other has to do it, too, just to show that he's as good a man, if not better."

Sergeant Truscott spoke very deliberately, with many pauses, weighing his words, and keeping his eyes fixed on the groups beneath us, gray shirts and red-and-black jerseys intermingled.

"Joe Garnham's by way of being a partickler friend of mine, is Joe. It was me persuaded him to enlist after he'd had trouble with his folks and left home. They keep a grocer's shop in Walham Green, a pretty tidy business, too, but Joe, he—well, Joe's hasty at times and he couldn't stand the shop and bein' indoors behind the counter all day an'—— Well, I dunno the rights and wrongs of it, and it don't matter, anyway. But Joe Garnham's about the best all-round man in the Battalion, good at everything an' doesn't know when he's beat. That's Joe.

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"Andy O'Brien, the other fighter—he's a little older than Joe, a year or so—comes from Liverpool. He's the very devil of a man. A black-haired feller, with a chin that shoots out inches, when 'e's angry, and a little black mustache, which don't hide his lips. A hard man is Andy, an' one not worth crossing, but a good soldier—yessir, the very best. I'm not in B Company, but B's as good as any.

"Now, sir, it's like this, then. Joe never gives in, once he's set his heart on anything, but Andy, so they say, 'd go through hell-fire itself to twist the devil's tail, if he'd a mind to. So there it is, an' you can guess what 'd be likely to happen if those two run up against each other. It 'd be more than a brigade field-day against a skeleton enemy with tea an' buns provided afterward in the Soldiers' Home.

"A matter of three months ago, Joe and Andy were in the final of the Middleweight Championship of the Reg'ment. Joe was just too heavy for a lightweight—'e'd won the lightweights the year previous—but he weighed all of twelve pound less than Andy notwithstandin'. My gun! I knew that would be a fight, an' it was.

"I was in Joe's corner, of course, an' he fought beautiful; as if he were sparrin' like those two down there. Whether he 'ad Andy quite beat, or not quite beat, I do not know. A close thing anyway with the odds on Joe. But in the last round Andy put his thumb out, an' not bein' able to use his right at all, got smothered, sudden and complete.

"And when time was called he sat in his corner with his eyebrows down over his eyes an' his chin stuck out like—like the grip of a Lee-Enfield. When the referee says: 'Sergeant Garnham wins,' he never changed 'is look—not a scrap—not even when Joe comes over to shake 'ands. He just glared like's if 'e were thinking how he could most conveniently kill Joe, an' the referee, and every one else in the place.

"An' now comes the real trouble. The fight's nothing at all. It's the usual, of course. Have you ever heard of Jessie Dunn? Her father used to be in the artillery, quartermaster-sergeant; him being chiefly noted for his figure, which is shaped after the style of a beer-barrel. Doesn't go runnin' around plowed fields, does old Tubby Dunn, if there's a seat handy.

"Well, anyhow, she's a slip of a girl is Jess, with a mop of dark red 'air, an' gray eyes that look at you steady-like. She's a quiet girl is Jess with a trick of keepin' a good deal to herself. Yes, and a nice girl, too.

"And both of these fellers, Joe and Andy O'Brien, is half crazed about her, and now —you see 'ow things are.

"JUST before I left the reg'ment to come over here for this course, Joe and me was walkin' across the p'rade-ground one evening, and we heard some one coming after us hotfoot. I turned right-about, and there was O'Brien.

" 'Garnham,' he says in a quiet way, 'can I 'ave a word with you, by yourself?' I said I'd stroll on an' wait, but a moment later Joe called to me and I moved back to where they was standin'.

" 'Here, Duff,' 'e says—I never have found out yet, why they call me Duff—'here, Duff. Listen to this,' says he. O'Brien was scowling. I could see he was in a temper, even for him, and Joe was mad too; as mad as—as a Maxim mule on maneuvers.

" 'This is between you an' me,' says O'Brien.

" 'I know, and for that reason,' says Joe, 'I want Truscott to 'ear. Look,' he says, turnin' to me, 'O'Brien says I'm not to talk to Miss Dunn any more. Just that!'

" 'I said,' remarks Andy, 'that I knew her first, an' you'd no right to come between us. You've no right to shove yourself in where you're not wanted. Or are you quite blind, man?'

" 'If Jess doesn't want me, O'Brien,' sez Joe, 'she can say so 'erself. An',' says 'e, 'since when has a man any claim on a girl, when he only knows 'er casual, same as fifty others? If you *were* anything to her, she'd clear me out —— sharp, an' you know it. I've as much right as any one till she tells me not, 'erself,' he says.

" 'Do you think,' says Andy, 'for one 'arf-minute, that I'm goin' to look on and let you 'ave a free hand to say what you like and—— Why, man alive!' he says, lookin' him up an' down. 'Man alive, I'd knock your head off before you did that!'

"Made me laugh to hear them, talkin' quite low and peaceful; Andy with his jaw out and his arms folded an' Joe smilin' with 'is 'ead cocked sideways and his hands be'ind his back. Might 'ave been discussin' the weather, the pair of them.

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" 'Knock my head off, O'Brien,' says Joe. 'Knock my head off, eh?' Then the smile went and he answered very slowly: 'An' what might I be doin'? Sittin' still while you did it? No, Andy O'Brien, I've stood up to you before, and if you remember what 'appened——'

"He didn't finish and I knew what he was driving at, as plain as the three stripes on his tunic.

" 'Yes,' says Andy, 'oh, yes! With a broken thumb. But Garnham—p'r'aps you wouldn't like to try again, some day, would you? There mightn't be a broken thumb next time.'

"And by the way he spoke I saw it was as good as settled, for those two men hated each other as much as it is in the nature of one man to hate another.

" 'Try again?' says Joe. 'Any day, hour or minute you want me, O'Brien, I'm ready and willing. I hear you've been tellin' people that that thumb saved me from being murdered. Oh, I'm ready! Only no hole-an'-corner business,' he says. 'I'm not for scrappin' in my shirt-sleeves back of the Morris-tube, with half a hundred band-boys and rookies yellin' and the Colonel an' Adjy an' a crowd of red-caps comin' up in the middle, and a visit to the orderly-room and a court-martial to follow,' says 'e.

" 'Name your place, then,' says O'Brien, with a laugh as happy as a kid's. 'Name your place and I'm with you. I never thought to have you in the ring again this side of eternity, Garnham,' he says. 'An' now,' says 'e, 'there's just one more thing. Whoever wins has a free 'and with Jess, and the other keeps out o' range altogether. See! That's fair for both.'

" 'Oh!" says Joe; 'and if by any miracle or another bad finger,' he says, 'I happen to win—such miracles 'ave happened before, Andy O'Brien—how do I know that——'

" 'Whatever else I am,' says Andy, 'I'm not such a blackguard as all that. If you win, I keep off—until she tells you what she thinks of you, that she's sick and tired of you, and that she never wants to see you again. Which,' he says laughin', 'she —— well will do.' And he walks away.

" 'That, sir, was why they've settled to have another fight for the Middleweight-Championship of the Regiment. They're goin' to have it out next Monday night down in the town here, as you saw on the poster this morning. Between you an' me, I'm glad—knowin' what I do—that they didn't fight in barracks. It'll be a great scrap, though; real great. And best man or not—I 'ope my man wins.

"Well, I must be off now, sir, just to show these rookies how to do a holler-back back-lift over the 'orse lengthways. You watch careful, too."

III

ACCORDINGLY, shortly before the hour of eight on the Monday evening following, Severn and I made our way through the crowd and entered the hall where the fight was to be held; Severn, because he had to; I, because if Sergeant Truscott's prophecy were fulfilled, I should see what would be worth seeing.

The hall, formerly an auctioneer's sales-room, was long, low and narrow, with iron pillars down the center and iron girders supporting the corrugated iron roof. The platform was built close up against one wall, between which and the ropes there was barely sufficient space for one row of chairs. On these chairs sat the judges, the timekeeper and a reporter or two, without interfering in the least with any lesser mortal's view.

Dotted about the ceiling were electric-light bulbs, unshaded and dazzling. As the windows in the roof could not be opened, there was no ventilation whatsoever. But as the manager, a stout little man in a gaudy waistcoat, remarked to Severn, this was, "but a small matther and afther all, 'tis the same for both bhoys."

Severn, who had by this time reached a condition of dumb amazement, nodded.

The scarlet of the soldiers' tunics showed up conspicuously against the sober blacks and grays of the civilians, and as Severn and I reached our seats, Sergeant Truscott tapped me on the shoulder.

"All the Sergeants' Mess is here," he whispered, "an' every one else—except Joe's other second, of course. The only time I ever wanted to see 'im, so naturally he's not shown up. Ginger's liable to forget almost anything when he gets clear of the barracks, but he swore faithful he wouldn't stop for a drink anywhere."

And Truscott drifted away forlornly.

Severn and I sat in the second row from the ring, at the side nearest the dressing-

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room. With us—and for once in my life I found myself in the company of those who move in high places—was the General in command of the District, rather bewildered at his surroundings, and his Brigade-Major, an enthusiast to whom a fight was a fight, whether at the National Sporting Club in London or in a barn such as this.

A red-faced gentleman seated immediately in front of the General turned and beamed on us in the most friendly way imaginable.

His name was Sullivan, he said. He came from Armagh and he followed the business of a corn-chandler. Also he sold an occasional horse. If any gentleman would like a drink, he knew where could be obtained the very best whisky in the North of Ireland.

At this, the General, who though an Irishman himself would have ignored Mr. Sullivan had it been possible, moved uneasily in his chair and plunged into a hurried conversation with Severn regarding the health of the troops in the garrison.

Later on, Mr. Sullivan, who had been shouting genial insults at one Murphy on the other side of the hall, once again addressed himself to the General, who bore his affliction in dignified silence.

"'Twould be the pleasanthest thing now iver you seen if your honor and I would tak' the floor for three rounds. Two fat owld Christhians like oursel's; the loser to pay for the dhrinks. No? Well, then I'll inthrojuice you to Jimmy Mulligan afther-wards; if he's sthill sober enough to be civil-shpoken you'll like the bhoy for his divilmint. You'll die laughin' at his antics. Don't be worrying, I'll see we have some fun before daybhreak."

But at this point an equally red-faced friend took the empty seat next him, and Mr. Sullivan of Armagh straightway entered into a fierce argument concerning the price of a horse which he—the friend—wished to dispose of.

"Dear me! It's close in here, isn't it!" said the General.

The first few fights were very ordinary, more than ordinary, feeble to a degree, although billed on the program in large type. Wherefore the back seats groaned their disapproval in a highly unorthodox and illegal manner, greatly to the stout manager's wrath.

A brief unscientific scuffle between two lightweights had ended in less than one round, when, attracted by a sudden buzz of excitement, I turned in my chair and saw Truscott elbowing through the crowd near the door of the dressing-room. At which, realizing that the time had come, I felt nervous and strangely unhappy, as though —explain it how you will—I, too, had something at stake. Everybody in the audience, from the General down to the raggedest street corner boy, had heard of the Regimental Championship, of course, but only Truscott and I were aware of how much depended on the next half-hour.

A DEEP roar went up as Joe Garnham, smiling unconcernedly, climbed into the ring. His two seconds followed: Truscott and a battered, red-headed private, carrying a bucket and a couple of towels. The red-headed private, the man who was liable to forget almost anything, knew more about bare-knuckle fighting, so I afterward was told, than any one else in the regiment. This was praise indeed, considering where and how the regiment was recruited.

Another wild outburst greeted O'Brien. He paid no attention to the noise. He never so much as threw a glance at the spectators, but stood with a coat thrown over his bare shoulders, talking to his seconds, and carefully weighing the gloves in either hand.

There was nothing to choose between the corners. The light must have been equally trying anywhere. But Garnham won the toss and seated himself on the chair on our side of the ring. Truscott fitted the gloves on his hands, while the red-haired private rubbed his arms and legs vigorously.

Then the manager, puffing with importance, clapped his hands.

"Gintlemen," he shouted, "gintlemen, this is Sergeant O'Brien on me right hand, and Sergeant Garnham on me left. Sixteen rounds of three minutes each an'—gintlemen I ask you once more, please to kindly refrain from applause durin' the roun's, an' —if you fellas don't stop smokin' yersel's 'll be slung out, —— quick!"

He ended amid applause.

The shirt-sleeved referee, a big sergeant in the Royal Irish Constabulary, stooped between the ropes, and the timekeeper, a cadaverous individual sitting with his back to the wall, said: "Seconds out!"

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I heard the red-headed private whisper to Garnham, "Good luck, an' for ——'s sake, mind 'is right!"

"Time!"

Garnham jumped to his feet and ran across to meet O'Brien, snatching mechanically at his glove as he passed him and then wheeling quickly.

If the fight had been decided on looks, and on looks alone, there could have been no doubt as to the winner.

Garnham caught the eye at once; he had the better action, the better stance, if you care to call it so; his head slightly tilted, his left well up. He was as light on his feet as a bantamweight; a clean-built man, with fine lines and broad shoulders narrowing to waist and hips. Even though his face was grave, his lips kept twitching every now and then into a smile, so good-natured and so brimful of confidence that if, for no other reason, nine persons out of ten sympathized, and wanted him to win.

O'Brien was clumsy by comparison, heavily built and stocky, with great rugged lumps of muscle on his back and arms, huge deltoids, strongly marked triceps and a forearm like a blacksmith's. He fought in a crouching attitude, with his head craning forward, his toes twisted inward and his knees bent, and both hands held on a level with his chin. He was no stylist, but a fighter through and through; the personification of brute force and energy, yet a clever boxer, if unorthodox.

The two men sparred at first, with pattering footsteps. Then Garnham jumped in, right, left, and was out again. O'Brien gave way a step. Garnham jumped in again, as he did so, and O'Brien swung his right, just flicking the other's ear. They circled round and round, breathing quickly, until O'Brien rushed, only to be met by a straight drive full in the mouth. A vague whisper went through the spectators, but he shook his head, and was back again, hitting out with right and left, more like some irresistible machine, than mere flesh and blood. Garnham ducked beneath his right and fell on him.

"Break!" said the referee, smiling. "Break away!" And they shook themselves free.

Garnham got in two beauties with either hand on chest and neck, and the bell rang.

The seconds hopped into the ring and the two men lay back in their chairs, breathing deeply with their heads back and their arms stretched out on the ropes. In that first round Garnham had scored every point, and O'Brien had lost a tooth, so Truscott, ever an optimist, grinned broadly as he flapped his towel.

"Seconds out!" and again, "Time!"

When two men are fighting mad, as those two were, they waste no time in unnecessary delay or in maneuvering for openings. Garnham led with his left, and was sent back half-way to the ropes by a punch on his ribs from O'Brien's right. O'Brien followed up hard, but Garnham slipped through his guard and fell on him.

"Break away!" bawled the referee, and they flung each other off angrily.

O'Brien went in again fiercely and took a half-arm hook on the jaw.

"Break away! break away!" and they wrestled across the ring, holding and smothering, their faces grim-set and wrathful, the flesh of their bare bodies glistening in the glare overhead.

"Break away there, you men!" shouted the referee.

They drew off, panting, and once more went to close quarters, both hitting out together, right and left, and once more they clinched.

The referee separated them as before, and Garnham caught O'Brien a couple of heavy smashes, left and right, over the heart. He grunted, shaking his head sourly, and, as though he had felt nothing, forced Garnham to the ropes with a terrific body-blow.

Then the timekeeper put his foot on the bell and we all shouted.

"'Tis a great fight," said Mr. Sullivan. "An elegant fight! The young fella is handy with his feet, but the other fella is the sthronger of the two."

Garnham had received more than he had given, and breathed in quick labored sobs, while Truscott flapped the air into his lungs and the red-headed private sponged him down, hissing for all the world like a groom with a currycomb.

Although on points it was still Garnham's fight, Truscott was worried as he stepped out on the ring.

"Keep him well in the middle, Joe," he said, and dropped to the floor where he remained motionless, with his elbows on the platform, staring up at the men fighting.

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THIS time it was O'Brien who led. Making not the slightest attempt to guard, he drove Garnham from one side of the ring to the other, giving him no rest, boring in with savage half-arm blows, right and left, against the ropes, in the center, back to the ropes again, while the referee became purple of countenance as he roared, "Break! Break, will yuh!"

Garnham, still smiling but not with his former self-confidence, gave back step by step, always by skilful footwork avoiding the corners, jabbing away at O'Brien's body, on the same place time after time, until O'Brien jerked up his chin for one short moment.

Then, like a flash, Garnham uppercut him. He went to the boards but was up again at once. Garnham rushed in, but O'Brien made a half-turn, shoved his head forward on to the other's chest and they both fell, Garnham underneath. It was like nothing so much as a shoulder-to-shoulder charge at football. Quite one half of the spectators, red-coats, civilians, boxers in mufflers and greatcoats, seconds in their shirt-sleeves, were standing up and yelling, but the referee was too busy now to pay any heed to the uproar. The two men were on their knees, wrestling and scuffling and hitting as if such things as the Marquess of Queensberry rules had never been drawn up for their benefit. Why the two of them were not disqualified then and there, only that sergeant in the R. I. C. knew; and he, if I judge aright, would gladly have given up all claim to a pension rather than put a stop to such a fight.

They scrambled to their feet again, not nice to look at, their bodies covered with blood. Then O'Brien swung his right viciously and sent Garnham down full length, half under the ropes.

He lay there, choking, but the bell rang and his seconds helped him across to his corner.

His lips and eyes were bleeding. He seemed dazed. But the sudden shock of cold water pulled him together again and he laughed feebly. But we all, even the most ignorant, knew that at this pace the fight must soon be over. If Garnham could not knock his man out in the next three minutes he could never hope to win.

And to all appearance O'Brien was in no better plight. You could see that as he stood up for the fourth round. He was breathing unevenly and big red blotches showed on the dead white of his body where Garnham had kept hitting him. But he was the stronger man of the two.

There was no waiting, of course. They made for each other at once. But they were tired by now, and the old fire and dash had gone. Garnham led, but O'Brien propped him off with his left forearm and forced him around the ring, slamming in slow sledge-hammer blows with his right, grunting each time he hit, until he had him penned against the ropes in the corner nearest to us. For the first time that night O'Brien smiled. And then Garnham—always a great fighter, never so great as now—side-stepped quickly and ducked under the swinging arms. I thought he was clear, everybody did, but O'Brien spun round on his heel and sent him across the ring with a punch behind the ear. He fell heavily, but was on his feet again almost immediately, hanging on O'Brien's neck.

O'Brien looked like a butcher, with little trickles of blood running down his cheek and bare shoulders.

"Break away!"

Smack! Garnham fell once more and the timekeeper counted to "seven" before he was up. When I caught sight of his face I felt wretched, for he had reached that stage where a man is not certain where his hands are.

Mr. Sullivan, who had not spoken for some time, turned in his chair.

"It's murdher! He's a glutton, that young fella that's bate, an' it's shamed of meself I am, settin' here all this time an' not able to help him!"

I nodded, sympathizing, and then of a sudden I found myself wondering why in that atmosphere of tobacco smoke and Irish whisky and dust, my thoughts kept wandering off to the clear wind-swept moorlands, until I saw a sprig of sweet-scented heather in Mr. Sullivan's buttonhole and understood.

Andy O'Brien had gone in to win, and had rushed Garnham slap-dash to the ropes, smiling grimly, slamming in left, right, left, right, piston-fashion, but with the engines at half-speed. Garnham had just sufficient strength left to keep his guard up, but it was no good. O'Brien feinted at his head with his left—a clumsy, palpable feint—and, as the beaten man raised both hands

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helplessly, lashed out with his right at the mark.

Garnham lay flat on his back with arms twitching.

"Nine!" and he was on his feet, staggering about blindly. O'Brien jumped in, eager to finish him off, but before he could hit, Garnham had toppled over sideways, his head striking the bare boards with a thud as of a cricket-ball struck with the full force of the bat.

The timekeeper counted slowly amid an almost painful hush: "One—two!"—then the bell again, and the crowd roared its relief.

THE two seconds lifted Garnham on his chair, his legs dragging limply; they sponged him, flapped him with the towels and made him drink from the neck of a bottle thrust between his lips until he choked and shook his head wearily.

Severn was on his feet at the ringside, speaking to Truscott, who nodded and bent over Garnham.

"Here," he said, "you're not goin' on, Joe. You're done. See! I'm goin' to throw up a towel!"

"You're not!" answered Garnham hoarsely. "I'm not beat! It 'd take a better man than 'im!"

"And yet," said the General—he too was past surprise—"and yet we can't get a heavyweight or a middleweight that will stay in the ring with the Yankees!" He ended in a low growl. "They ought to stop it!"

So the fifth round began. It was butcher's work now; a massacre, not boxing.

Garnham reeled into the center of the ring, with his left well up. O'Brien ran at him. *Smack! Smack!* He spun round and went over in a heap.

The red-headed private had climbed on the platform, ready to enter the ring. O'Brien stood over Garnham, waiting, with the same grim smile on his lips.

"Get back, O'Brien, at once! Do you hear?" shouted the referee. The timekeeper was standing with his watch in his left hand, waving his right in the air, like a bandmaster, bringing it down every time he counted a second.

"One! — two! — three!" Garnham was slowly struggling to get up, his breath coming in deep sobs, his brain and muscles refusing to work together. "Four!" He was on his knees, holding the lower rope. "Five!" On one knee, groping with his gloved hand for the top rope. "Six!" He had found the rope, and was swinging it backward and forward, trying for a purchase. "Seven!—eight!"—and he was on his feet, still clutching the rope.

O'Brien dashed across. *Smack! Smack!* Cruel blows; and the long drawn-out agony was at an end.

Garnham relaxed his grip, slid slowly on to the floor and lay huddled up with his legs bent and his arms covering his face.

Whereupon chaos! I heard an indignant shout of "foul!" from Mr. Sullivan and saw the red-headed private clamber into the ring, snarling like a bull-terrier. He clutched wildly at the referee, who had hold of O'Brien, and tried to swing round him. Whereat O'Brien's seconds, also in the ring, grabbed the red-headed private by the waist, and all three men crashed down in a struggling tangle. Truscott was in the ring also, seeing after the beaten man. He helped him to his feet but, as he turned to reach for the chair, supporting him with one hand, Garnham broke away, put up his fists once again and made for O'Brien, swaying helplessly.

"I'm not beat," he said. "I'm not beat." Then he collapsed for good and all, and Truscott stooped and carried him to his corner.

O'Brien had won, and all that crowd of yelling maniacs thought that he had been fighting for the Middleweight Championship of the Regiment. But I knew better.

And as I set it down, so it happened.

IV

OWING to circumstances over which I had no control, I had no opportunity of talking privately with Sergeant Truscott for some days. But on Thursday morning we managed to snatch a few moments' hurried conversation in the gymnasium.

Truscott plunged into the middle of things at once.

"Well, sir, I told you that would be a fight, didn't I? Beat anything I ever saw in my life! And I've seen a good few here an' there. Joe wasn't so very bad really. Face marked, that's all, an' he didn't even go sick the next day. They never shook hands though, if you remember, an' between you an' me I can't say I'm surprised.

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"When you 'ave one of the beaten man's seconds scrappin' with the other man's two, an' the beaten man trying to fight the referee, an' the winner sittin' on the floor, lookin' pretty far gone himself, and offerin' to out the loser again for a tanner, why you don't think o' shaking hands or anything else. More like a set o' Gyppy coal-'eavers fightin' at Port Said for a shank of a ham-bone than or'nary human beings. But that was a fight, wasn't it! I told you what it would be. You don't happen to 'ave 'eard, sir, what the General thought of it, do you?"

"Look here, Sergeant Truscott," said I, ignoring the question, "there's a lot more that I want to hear. When is Andy O'Brien going to marry Jessie Dunn, eh?"

I felt a natural curiosity as to the sequel to the fight.

Truscott gazed at me as though completely mystified. Then his face cleared and he laughed.

"Lord! I'd forgotten all about *her*. Let me see. The next afternoon, we saw Andy O'Brien walkin' across the square, dressed up in his walkin'-out kit, with 'is swagger-stick and 'is sash all neat an' nice.

" 'There he goes,' sez Joe. Very dismal too, was Joe, thinking of the blackness of his eyes and puffy lips. 'I hadn't a chance against him really; hitting him was like smashin' my knuckles against a brick wall.'

" 'You may have smashed your knuckles,' I says, 'but you 'ave also pretty near smashed his face in. Win or not, there's not much to choose between you when it comes to looks. Fine sight, ain't it?' And I spoke the truth there.

"Joe never said a word about Jess Dunn, but I knew he was thinkin' things over. Then 'e says, 'Duff,' says 'e, 'I'm going to try an' get out to India when the next draft goes.'

"Andy came back later, lookin' like the Lancers' death's-head, and I—— But after all, though he is the biggest fool between here an' Bloemfontein, he isn't a bad chap in 'is way. I heard later what happened. Andy let slip the fact to Jess that they had fought for her. And, sir, if you'll believe me, Jess was so sick she said she'd never speak to him again.

"Bit of a shock for 'im, eh? Poor devil! An' the following day, yesterday, she met Joe, who was equally to blame, of course, and asked him why he 'adn't been near her for so long. An' then she said if he 'adn't nothing better to do, 'e could take her out for a stroll. Girls are rum things, though, ain't they?

"*That* was the finish of the Middleweight Championship of the Regiment. Because —well, she's a will of 'er own, has Jess, and she's told Joe straight he's got to chuck boxin' altogether.

"And I'm to have the privilege and honor of bein' best man!"

But, as I said before, I am by no means certain how it all came about. On the whole I am more than inclined to agree with Sergeant Truscott that "girls are rum things," and leave it at that.

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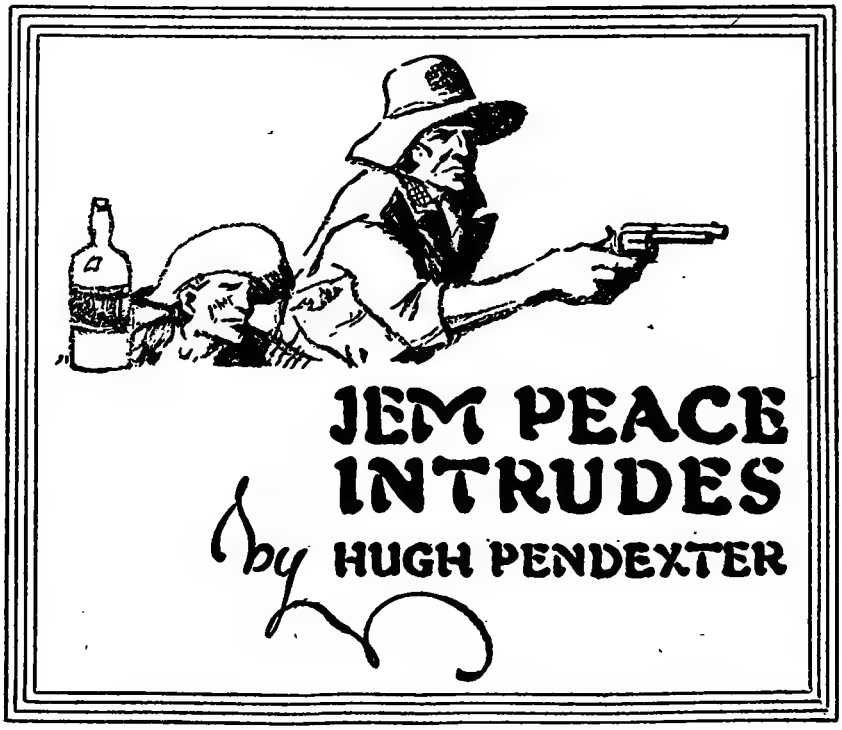

JEM PEACE INTRUDES

by HUGH PENDEXTER

WILL ERING'S capture by Blisson, the new sheriff, might have been passed up with only casual comment, as he was practically a stranger in those Montana parts. But the method employed to effect his arrest, plus the fact he was charged with violating the cattle-law while riding in the train of that redoubtable old sinner Jem Peace, spiced the event with more than ordinary interest and was, on this particular night, the sole topic of conversation at Gruder's saloon, making much for thirst.

Only the elderly man asleep behind the stove, his head pillowed on his arms, was indifferent to the chatter.

Lonesome White, much given to dwelling on the pathos of life, voiced the sentiments of one faction when he regretted the ruse which had laid the youth by the heels. As his vinous sympathy warmed he insisted:

"It sort o' harrers me, fellers, to know the cub was decoyed here by being made to think his gal was sick and wanted to see him. When a man takes a chance for a woman it seems as if he oughter git away with it."

"I don't see it," mildly argued Gruder, pausing in his burlesque of polishing a glass. "If that was the case he wouldn't be taking no chances and wouldn't be deserving no credit if he did git away with it. No, Lonesome; young Ering was invited to play. After sizing up the stakes he set in—and lost out. I'll admit, Lonesome, that there's po'try in the case what appeals to your po'try-like natur', but the law must be upheld even if we never skin a cat."

As he concluded and silently appealed to his patrons, those who were wise in the ways of Gruder nodded solemnly and scrutinized their empty glasses.

"I reckon we have to depend on Mr. John Gruder to put things clear and bright-like," cunningly admired old Bill Danker, who was always a partisan on the side furnishing the drinks. "The whole thing now is as clear as the nose on my face."

If his metaphor were a bit dubious, especially as the nose referred to was a very red, bulbous nose, liberally streaked with fiery veins, it did not fail to have its expected effect, and Gruder, with a little

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beneficent gesture of the hand, murmured:

"Drink up and have a little touch with me, boys."

But Lonesome White, either careless of winning favor or else suffering from some temperamental defect, shook his shaggy head dogmatically and maintained:

"Blisson oughter started in to make his record with a gun. It's a cheap city-game to write a feller his gal is sick and then pounce down on the tenderest feelings in a human bosom."

"What's the odds what kind of bait you use so long as you bag the game?" testily demanded Gruder.

"When a feller's in love," declared Lonesome, "it seems as if he oughter have a showdown for his 'fections. Where's your romance if love is to be hammered into a wedge and driv' into a man's bosom till it lands him in a log jail at Vezie?"

Gruder sighed and was collecting his arguments anew, preparatory to crushing his opponent beneath large masses of logic, when the front door opened with a crash and terminated the debate.

THE newcomer, a man of some seventy years, slim of physique and bowed of shoulders, seemed to predominate the scene once he had thrust his tobacco-stained beard over the threshold. Before the little gathering could fully sense his noisy intrusion he had advanced unsteadily to the bar, had incontinently elbowed old Bill from his vantage-ground next to the bottle, and in a loud, raucous voice was demanding:

"Gimme some whisky quick, Mr. Barkeep, out of the bottle ye use yerself. I wouldn't swap my thirst fer a hundred head o' cattle."

The thing was unpardonable. It hadn't happened in Gruder's for years. Gruder stared at the stranger stonily for several moments, giving his friends time to anticipate what was about to happen. As his small black eyes narrowed each man furtively punched his neighbor.

"I'm waiting," bruskly barked the stranger, tapping the bar with a lean forefinger.

"Say," purred Gruder in a low, thick voice, thrusting his head far forward to accent the tempo of his query, "who the —— be you?"

The loungers indulged in a general sigh of satisfaction at the terse challenge of these few words. Best of all, it was merely the prelude. For Gruder had an eye for dramatic effect and never went off half-cocked.

To the amazement of the habitués the stranger rocked derisively on his heels and smiled dryly. He even had the hardihood to squint up his faded eyes in a palpable leer.

"Who be I?" he drawled, cocking his old head to one side and blowing contemptuously through his beard. "Here's the only visiting-keerd I carry about." And he quickly rested the blue-black barrel of a .44 across the top of the bar.

The line stiffened. It promised to be more entertaining than any one had dared to hope. Even Lonesome's sad face lighted up expectantly. Surely Gruder's was looking up. It might even swing back to the full measure of its old-time reckless reputation. The men took a hurried inventory of the windows and other possible exits and then waited contentedly for the climax.

Gruder's gross face hardened under the menace of the gun, while his eyes glittered with cunning. It was the game he loved. Only it had been a long time since he had found a patron who would fight back.

"You said whisky?" he smoothly asked, sliding his right hand under the bar.

"Yas—*whisky*," grinned the stranger, shoving the gun forward. "Put yer hand on the bar and do it—slow."

Relinquishing the butt of his favorite revolver Gruder obeyed, the veins on his low forehead congesting ominously, and passed out a black bottle. Eagerly filling his glass with his left hand the stranger whimsically remarked: "I happen to be busted. Hope ye don't mind hanging this up fer a spell."

In the argot of Gruder's this was the limit.

"Who the —— be you?" gritted the infuriated proprietor.

Tossing off his drink the stranger leaned negligently against the bar and to the amazement of the men carelessly replaced his revolver in his coat. As he surrendered this advantage the wide-eyed line prepared to dodge and run. Stealthily Gruder's right hand crept back to his gun, his cruel eyes flaming with triumph.

As his stubby fingers clutched the familiar butt the stranger thoughtfully gazed at the rough ceiling and quietly observed:

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"My friends is allowed to call me Jem. Other folks has to call me Mr. Peace."

"JEM PEACE!" exclaimed Gruder, dropping his gun.

The loungers jerked their heads up sharply and old Bill was so overcome that he filled his glass twice.

"Any one got any objections to that name?" mildly inquired the stranger, turning his gaze to sweep the line of startled profiles.

Gruder bit his lips. It was hard lines, but he had nursed discretion from his youth. He was ever ready for the ordinary bad-man, but Jem Peace was in a class by himself.

"It's a name I admire," he cried, taking care to keep both hands frankly before him. "Gruder's feels honored to have you drop in, Mr. Peace. I thought you was one of them trouble-makers over Colton way. Have another touch on the house?"

"I'm mighty proud to drink your good health," loudly proclaimed old Bill, generously recharging his glass.

The others, finding the tension thus wholesomely relaxed, now joined in bidding the celebrated rustler and gun-fighter welcome. For many years old Jem Peace had been "ag'in the law," the despair of many a sheriff, the enemy of many a cattleman and the pride of the State press. Undoubtedly he was guilty of many rascalities, but he possessed a whimsical personality that endeared him to all who had never paid tribute to his eccentric diagnosis of the common law. Like Robin Hood and Claude Duval, the old sinner was enveloped in the glamour of romance that tickled the imagination of many and made him vastly popular with hungry newswriters, also as a topic of conversation in drinking-bouts.

"I ain't been up in this neck o' the woods fer years," he smiled as he filled and emptied his glass at each invitation. "I hate like sin to pull up here broke, but I thought ye wouldn't mind."

"The house is yours, Mr. Peace," laughed Gruder, shaking the celebrated pistol-hand warmly. "You're just as welcome as if you had a million."

"Seeing as how ye feel that way, let's h'ist again," grinned the stranger. "Seeing as how there's a matter of five hundred plunks on my head it shows I like good company, to ride way up here. Looks like I was spitting in the face of the reward, eh? Here's looking to everybody and to the devil with the sheriff at Colton and the new sheriff in this town of Vezie!"

The conversation now dwindled into a monologue as the newcomer became obsessed with confidential impulses. Waxing biographical he regaled his amused hearers with many a boast of his prowess as a lawbreaker.

"Yas," he garnished one lengthy pictorial recital with saying, "I'm Jem Peace who the law loves so much it offers five hundred plunks fer my company—and here I be as cozy as a flea on a dawg, a-drinking of my licker and making new friends! Five hundred fer me and nobody seems to want it! Now let's licker to the health of Mr. Gruder, what is a man ye can clasp to yer bosom!"

Gruder, who had been weighing the advisability of attempting to collect the reward, sorrowfully decided the game wasn't worth the risk and with a genial smile pushed forward the bottle.

Suddenly the stranger's eyes hardened and his lean figure straightened. Old Bill, catching the full glare of the glittering gaze, backed away abruptly and uneasily asked:

"Ain't the licker to your liking?"

For an answer the newcomer replaced his glass untouched and strode back of the stove, where the sleepy old man was now sitting erect, gaping at the bar. "Say," gritted the guest of the evening, clapping the old man on the shoulder, "didn't ye hear me say every one up fer a housewarmer? Be ye deef?"

"I—I beg yer pardon, kind sir," apologized the old man in a trembling voice, tottering to his feet and fumbling at his sharp chin nervously. "I reckon I must have fell asleep. Drink with ye? Gladly, sir."

"That's better," growled the other, stalking unevenly back to the bar. "I hate like sin to git fussed up, but it always riles my dander to have a man act offish and sidestep his five fingers."

"Here's to yer very good health, sir," meekly saluted the old man, raising his glass.

"Drink hearty, old un," hiccoughed the boaster, throwing back his head to accommodate his own potation.

"Keep right where ye be," growled the sleepy old man. And the maudlin loungers were stupefied to behold a duplicate of their

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new acquaintance's heavy gun tickling the latter's neck.

"REST of ye folks kindly keep yer hands on the bar," gently advised the old man. "There's five hundred dollars reward for this critter and I need the money! Now, Jem, up with yer paws! Right-about, face. Stand quiet while I borrer yer weapon. Now we're off with a good start. Forward, march!"

As they reached the threshold the old man turned and advised: "I see ye have a telephone. Jest kindly let the sheriff know I'm coming with a prisoner. And not knowing but what some of ye may be pals of Jem's I'd take it as a favor if ye'd all keep indoors fer a spell."

"Who the —— is *he?*" faintly cried Gruder as the door closed softly.

"Search me," shuddered old Bill, groping for the bottle. "All I know is he's got enough nerve to land Jem Peace. That let's me out of his game!"

"CAN it be possible!" exclaimed the delighted sheriff after his visitor had deposited his prisoner in a corner and had handed over a .44 Colt, showing the initials "J. P." roughly carved on the handle. "I was afraid Gruder was trying to kid me. So, this is the notorious Jem Peace?"

The drunken prisoner rallied at the words and fought off his stupor long enough to announce: "I'm Jem Peace. I'm here to intervoow the new sheriff, who's been talking sassy about me. I'll have his sculp afore I quit these parts." Then he subsided into a mumbling heap on the floor.

"Caught him drunk and off his guard," chuckled the old man. "I'm Ed Dagget from over Colton way. Sheriff Banks is aiming fer here, but I've got ahead of him."

Blisson's eyes glowed exultingly. Ever since learning the old outlaw was back in his section of the country he had prayed he might keep away from Vezie. Only that afternoon, however, Sheriff Banks, of Colton, had telephoned to be on the watch, that he was following Peace with a posse. But now the much-feared old villain had been trapped through his love for liquor and Sheriff Blisson would receive considerable praise, albeit another had effected the capture.

"Great Scott!" he rejoiced. "You certainly done good work, Mr. Dagget. If you'll join me I'll make you a deputy in a second. This makes two of the gang I've nailed already, and I ain't been in office only a month."

"Excuse me," politely reminded Dagget, "but I opine *I* caught this feller. Ain't there five hundred dollars reward fer his capter?"

The sheriff's face lengthened. The payment of the reward would evidence that he had had nothing to do with the capture. "You shall have the money," he sighed.

"When can I have it?" asked the old man as he helped support the swaying prisoner to a cell. "I won't make no bones of saying I'm broke. A few hundred would look bigger'n a steer to me jest now. I didn't go into this fer any glory. Ye're welcome to all that sort of stuff!"

"Come back to the office," eagerly invited the sheriff. As they entered this room, after the sheriff had locked up the prisoner's revolver, he turned and asked: "You want the money in a hurry?"

"I should say I do. I want to be well down-country to-morrer. I can't stick round here."

"Then what do you say to assigning your claim to me?" cunningly suggested the sheriff. "I'll give you four hundred for it now."

"Four hundred and fifty and I'm on," returned the old man. "A hundred is too much to pay fer the accommodation. Besides, I'm leaving you to corral all the glory."

"All right," agreed the sheriff, striving to conceal the joy in his face. "Wait here till I go to my room for the money."

"HELLO, Banks," jovially greeted Blisson, as the sheriff from Colton entered the office, his person showing many traces of a long, rough ride.

"Gruder says you've beaten me to it," ruefully replied Banks. "The boys of the posse are down there now hearing how it happened. So you've nabbed Jem Peace? Well, it's worth two thousand votes at your next election. I had hopes of bagging him. I've been on his trail for twenty-four hours. How does he take it?"

"I was just going in to see what he wants for breakfast," proudly said Blisson. "Come and have a look. I've got quite a houseful."

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Unlocking the door leading to the cell corridor he stopped before the first iron bars and requested, "Cast your peepers in there."

"Good Lawd! where did you pick *him* up?" cried Banks, staring at the snoring figure on the bunk. "Haven't seen him round for several years."

Conscious of a faint feeling spreading over the pit of his stomach Blisson weakly asked: "What do you mean?'

"Just what I say. Where in the world did you ever pick up old Forty-Rod Tompkins, one of the funniest characters in Montana and one of the best actors in the world when drunk? He's the worst blusterer and bluffer and greatest coward if his bluff is called that ever came West. He always claims, when drunk, that he's some big gun-fighter. Last time I had him he was advertising himself as Jesse James."

"What!" shrieked Blisson. "Isn't he old Jem Peace?"

"Old Jem? Trying to kid me?" muttered Banks. "This is old Forty-Rod, I tell you. Up to three years ago he was bothering the life out of every sheriff in the State by getting drunk and representing himself to be some member of the Hole-in-the-Wall gang, or the like. Some one would take him seriously and rush for a 'phone. Then out would ride a posse, only to find old Forty-Rod. What do you mean about his being Peace? Where is Peace?"

"Lord knows; I don't. I thought he was Peace!" groaned Blisson.

For several moments Banks was too dumbfounded to speak. Then he hysterically cried: "If that ain't a rich joke on you, Blisson! But for Heaven's sake keep it quiet. If it gets out it will queer you for reëlection. It must be hushed up."

"Banks, I paid four hundred and fifty dollars for that old cuss. Took an assignment of Dagget's claim on the reward," wailed Blisson.

"Gorrymighty!" yelped Banks. "Come back to the office and give me the details."

After Blisson had recounted the doings of the night, Banks thought fast and hard. Finally he declared: "It must be dropped. Don't let on you ever paid Dagget any money. Simply say a stranger brought this fellow here. Say! Did this Dagget fumble his chin while talking?"

"Quite a lot," dismally replied Blisson.

"Quick! Lead me to young Ering's cell."

On arriving there they found it empty, even as Banks had feared. The door was unlocked and open.

Sadly returning to the office Banks explained: "The man who said he was Ed Dagget, from over my way, was Jem Peace himself! He trimmed off his whiskers a week ago, as I found out yesterday. Yesterday I got word he was making this way. I knew he was planning to get young Ering clear. By Judas, the old rascal turned the trick! When you went to get the reward-money he took the cell key from the nail and slipped down the corridor. If you hadn't given him that chance he would have stuck you up. He had hosses ready, of course—and that's the end of it."

While Blisson was scouring his vocabulary for fitting terms of reproach to apply to Peace, Gruder entered the office. "Morning, gents," he easily saluted. "Here's a letter the old guy who nabbed Peace asked me to hand to you, Sheriff. Dropped in on me right after midnight. Darned if I didn't have to bring it to show I liked his nerve."

Blisson tore open the soiled envelope, read the inclosure and then silently handed the scrawl to Banks. The latter read:

deer sheruf—I give four hundred of the rewad money to ering and his gal. Wen you git this they wil be over the line and married. I kept fifty to pay me for my time. I hope the votters wont never larn about it all, meaning the way you and me got foold, as it wuld dump you out of ofise. If ering is caut agan it wil all come out in the pappers. You have a good gun of mine loked in the saf. I tried the door but it was loked. Pleas leave it at gruders sos I can cal for it. My motto is forgive and forgit. Yours truly—J. PEACE.

"Thanks, Gruder," mumbled Blisson, tearing up the note.

"Oh, that's all right. I liked the old guy's nerve. Besides, he left a ten-spot with me and wanted me to tell you to tell old Peace that when he's set free there's several rounds of drinks waiting for him at my place!"

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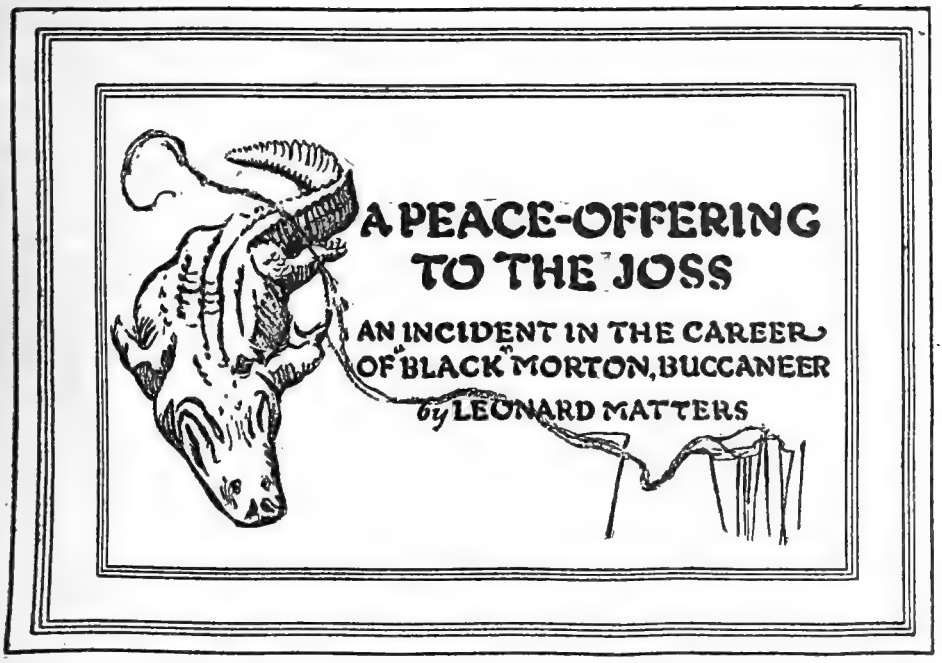

TWENTY-FIVE years ago the population of Port Darwin consisted of the Government Resident and others. The Government Resident is mentioned specifically because he was the only real circumstance—the pomp and might of Her Britannic Majesty, Queen Victoria, personified and paramount.

Where is Port Darwin? Port Darwin only wants a push to send it, Residency and all, into Torres Straits. To-day, it is the last port of call for vessels trading from Australia to the Orient. To-morrow, it will be the first port of call for the Japanese army that seeks to conquer Australia. Yesterday—well, say in Captain Morton's time—its dignity was all it got from the Government Resident, and the establishment of a cable station there to connect Australia with the rest of the world.

True, the pearl fleets and the trepang-fishers honored it with a visit on occasions, to get water, trade off valueless fish-pearls for tick-fevered cattle and skeleton sheep, or break up the place and the peace of Her Majesty's representative. Generally speaking, it slumbered all day and gargled all night, when its handful of white people wasn't solving problems of international consequence, the knowledge of which was gained from the cable news that came all the way under the sea from Singapore. Oh, yes, the cable-operators let it out. Trust a cable-operator in a dead-and-alive place like Port Darwin to contract the prevailing habit of gossiping!

The population, beyond the Great Circumstance and the operators, consisted of a score of white traders and some white wives, a few Malay servants, a couple of Jap spies, a hundred or so Chinese miners, rooting and scratching for gold, and the miserable remnant of a native tribe.

It did not require Captain Morton's ostentatious salute to remind the Port Darwinians that it was the Queen's birthday, when he took the *Harriet Constance* into the anchorage, and opened on the defenseless port with his battery, consisting of a brass gun, salvaged from an ancient wreck on Easter Island. Every one knew it, because every one who was any one had been discussing the Government Resident's levee for the last month; and even the Government Resident didn't hold a levee that all had to attend, under pain of severe displeasure, except on the Queen's birthday.

Then it was a question whether the function wasn't more in honor of the

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Resident than of the Widow of Windsor. It certainly gave him the opportunity to shine in all his splendor of uniform, cocked hat, and gold-hilted sword, which poked through his coat-tails like a skewer through a round of beef, as he stood in the shade cast by the drooping Royal Standard, and, after placing a limp fat hand in fifty others, read out a message of love and good-will from Her Majesty. He never admitted that the message was not sent to him direct from Windsor Castle, but was really a copy pirated from the cable station as the original went through to Sydney.

It was balm to the liver-stricken soul of the Resident to pretend that he was in direct and—if circumstances warranted the worry—daily communication with Her Majesty. Nor was the balm any less sweet because he knew that the gossiping population knew of his pretense.

CAPTAIN THEOPHILUS H. MORTON, otherwise "Black" Morton, however, had sailed the Pacific round. He knew what a circumstance a British Resident was supposed to be, and he might have been a member of the diplomatic corps, so profitably had he benefited by his attendance at flag-raisings, and annexations, and consular glorifications; and so punctilious was he in the observances of custom and ceremony.

"Bill," said he to the mate, as the *Harriet Constance* ran in past Signal Head with the Stars and Stripes at her peak, "this is the Queen's birthday, and it's up to us to remember it. Man the starboard battery, send up the only keg of black powder we've got, and a bucket of hot coals from the galley with a marlinespike stuck in 'em. I'm goin' to fire a salute."

"You'll blow the —— old hooker up, that's what you'll do," replied the mate, who could never raise any enthusiasm over Morton's pleasantries. "Count me out of this shootin'-match."

"Now see here, Bill," snapped the skipper, "I don't stand for ceremony on this packet. Me an' you's got on pretty well, forgettin' we're skipper an' mate; but if I've got to remind you who's who, an' what's what, by the Lord, I'll do it, and double-quick too!" His quick temper flooded his face to apoplectic fulness. "You jest cut that back-slack, before I chuck you overboard. And quit bad language, for I don't stand for that where I'm skipper. Get me? If you don't I'll show you how. I've got reasons for what I do, and if I ain't, my orders go! Yes, sir, don't forget that! My orders go! And God help the man on this schooner that don't believe it, and act as though he believed it, mate or no mate. We fire a salute of twenty-one guns, not a blamed one less. Now jump to it!"

The mate did so. Relations with the skipper had been strained as the evil consequence of success, which had dulled the mate into a forgetfulness of what Morton could be when he was crossed, or ill-luck dogged his steps. The mate was a coward; but he would have been brave to the verge of suicide, had he, seeing the old light in Morton's eyes—the light that had blazed forth on many an occasion when the skipper had been earning his name by his deeds among the lonely islands—not heeded the warning its flashing conveyed to him. So he stepped lively, and had the old brass gun ready for action when the skipper came forward to honor the day.

"If it hurts your democratic soul any," was Morton's final thrust at the surly mate, "you can think this is the Fourth of July; but if you learned your trade on a river barge, I didn't. Port etiquette has got to be observed where I float!" and he banged home a pound of powder.

The gun tugged at its lashings as Black applied the hot spike to the touch-hole, and the crew fell back coughing with the vile thick smoke. In half an hour the awful ordeal was over, and the *Harriet Constance* was enveloped in a cloud of murk, to the glory of England's queen and the satisfaction of the skipper.

"That'll show 'em we mean no offense, at any rate," said the big sailor, as he went below to wash the smoke and powder from his hands and face, and attire himself like a gentleman for his contemplated call on the Resident.

Morton had blown into Port Darwin before a typhoon which convinced him that he could not get out of Torres Straits with his sticks standing while it held charge. With philosophy worthy of the Oriental, he had accepted the inevitable and run for the Port, anticipating with some degree of satisfaction the opportunity to replenish his supplies and fill the water butts. He welcomed the prospect of an early and

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satisfactory deal with some wealthy Chinese in the matter of a little bag of pearls that reposed safely in his hip pocket in close proximity to his revolver.

How he had acquired the baubles belongs to another story. Methods peculiarly his own had given him the possession of twenty thousand dollars' worth without the arduous necessity of diving for them or hanging on for weeks to a fetid shell bed. Morton never lost an opportunity and if one presented itself in Port Darwin for him to exchange pearls that might be seized by the authorities for cash that could not be claimed by any one, he was going to take it. It was a coincidence merely that he made the safe roadstead on the Queen's birthday, but his humor was to impress the Port that his visit was a special honor for the occasion. Hence the salute, that on any other day would have sent the population into fits.

Clad in his whitest ducks, and exuding a generous aroma of palm-oil and frangipani, applied with unstinted liberality to his beard and thatch, Black called away his boat with four men at the oars. The mate recoiled before the overpowering perfume, and sniffed, as Morton walked past him to the rail.

"Takes me back to the Barbary Coast," he snorted.

"Well, you ain't asked for your opinion concernin' my tonsorial effects," snapped Morton. "Bargees ain't supposed to smell anythin' but tallow an' beer."

The mate flushed under the studied insult, and his lip rolled back from his buck teeth.

"We'll have the ship smartened up, Mr. Hawke," Morton continued as he stood with his hand on the rail. "The boss panjandrum of this dump will return our official call later in the day, and there ain't no guess comin' to you as to what happens aboard this craft if she ain't just what she ought to look when the visitation occurs. I'll be gone a couple of hours."

Morton was in his boat as the last words left his lips, and above the rattle of the oars he heard the mate express him at mail rates straight to Hades.

"Guess I'll have to take a couple of reefs in that fellow's sass when we get on the high seas again," Morton muttered, and turned his boat's head for the rickety little pier, on which half the population awaited his coming.

MORTON brought alongside in his best fashion and dropped the yoke-lines. The crew up-ended their oars, and the American stepped out for all the world like a duly accredited representative of the power of which he wished Port Darwin to believe he was the ambassador. Assuming his greatest dignity, he walked up to the Residency, and found the Resident indulging in his fourth whisky and soda, to recover from the ordeal just concluded under the droping Standard.

"Morton, sir, Captain Theophilus Henry Morton, aforetime of the United States navy," he repeated with quiet emphasis, and disregard of truth, as he met the inquiring gaze of the Resident. "Jest dropped in, Judge, to pay the respects of myself and country on this noble occasion. Sorry I could not get up in time for the levee, but guess my salute was all accordin' to Cocker or Hoyle."

"Charmed to make your acquaintance, Captain Morton," replied the delighted official; "charmed, I am sure. Speaking officially I may say that Her Majesty's representative is duly sensible of the great honor you have paid him, and it shall be his—er, pleasing duty to convey to Her Majesty the mark of respect which you—er, have accorded her natal day. And now, Captain, my official reception being over, so to speak, otherwise adjourned until I visit your ship, let me, in my private capacity, ask you what you drink?"

"Well, now, I guess I'm warm enough to make steam of anything you've got with a stick in it. Thanks, I'll take it my way," and Black tossed half a tumblerful of whisky down his throat, and threw about the same quantity of water after it.

"Did I hear you say you were of the American navy, Captain?" the Resident asked.

"You heard me say I *was*, Judge," replied Morton; "at present, I'm unattached; sort of auxiliary. Speakin' correctly, trade representative in the Pacific."

"Ah, yes, Captain, lots of trouble out there of course, and big interests to look after! Well, this port is at your service, and yours to command. I'll take you up to the club myself and introduce you."

The Government Resident disappeared for ten minutes, and came back dressed in his less official white suit. With Morton he walked across to the Darwin Club, where

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the skipper was duly presented to a score of men in the conventional dress of singlets and white pants. To some of the men Morton's name was doubtless fairly well-known; but they were all strangers to him save one fresh-faced Englishman named Ruthven, trading for a big house in Shanghai.

"Morton, by all that's remarkable!" shouted Ruthven hilariously, as he gripped the hand of the big sailor.

"Yours truly," acknowledged the skipper. "I kinder guess we've met before, somewheres. Was it in the Gilberts or the Ellice Group, friend?"

"The Gilberts, Captain. What's brought you so far west of your longitude? Gunboats or some new bed?"

Morton frowned the young man to silence, and spoke of a special mission to Timor. He had no desire to be cross-questioned in such company by a man who might know too much about him, and he signaled Ruthven to a table where he called for drinks.

"Now, Mr. Ruthven," Morton began, "let's renew acquaintance. Guess you know me better than I remember you. Don't know that I ever bought any copra from you, did I?"

"Not exactly, Captain, but when you'd done with the islands where I was picking up experience I don't think there was a pound of it to be had for love or money. You got the lot, and left old King Falakulu as berserk as a Malay run amuck. Oh, I don't bear you any grudge! Fact is, I'm real glad to meet the man who beat that old swindler, although your trick on him made me up sticks and get out for a healthier place. But tell me, Morton, what did you net out of that deal?"

"Well, I calkilate that if you bought it for what I sold it for, you wouldn't have enough change out of ten thousand to buy wine for the broker," and the skipper smiled. "Now, Mr. Ruthven," he added quickly, "no offense meant, but I ain't walkin' my history round with me. I'm not here for my health, and guess I don't intend no harm. I got certain business to attend to, and when I've done that, and got your big chief here properly filled with whatever his poison is on board my schooner, I want to get away to sea. Right at this moment I'm lookin' for water and fresh meat. Maybe," he added, "if I can meet up with the wealthiest Chinese in this metroplis I can do some trade."

RUTHVEN was rather disappointed when he found the big American averse to telling more of his particular exploit in which the Englishman himself had been a mystified sufferer; but he appreciated Morton's desire for silence regarding his career, and cordially gave him all the information necessary to the fulfilment of his wants regarding the ship.

"And if you want the richest Chink we've got in this port," said Ruthven, "I can take you along to old Louey Yick. How wealthy he is, I don't know. He's been here over thirty years, and has got goggle-eyed counting his money. What do you want with him, Morton? Oh, excuse me, Captain, I forgot you don't care to answer questions! And now I mention Louey Yick," Ruthven continued, "do you happen to want a charter, Captain?"

"Depends on what it is, where it goes, and what it means in hard dollars, or their exchangeable equivalent," replied the skipper.

"Always a business man, Captain. Let me explain. This old Chinaman—he must be nearly a hundred, if I'm any judge of years—has been bothering the life out of me to find a hold that will pack a big fat thirty-foot, hungry alligator to China for him."

"Well, you certainly got off that pretty, Mr. Ruthven. Guess your Oriental collector of reptilian monstrosities must be about tired of looking for a ship that'll take his charter. What's the provocation?"

"It's something like this, Captain," Ruthven answered, enjoying Morton's whole-hearted interest in the strange shipment he was being asked to handle. "Old Louey did something awful in his own land when he was a young man. What it was, I don't know exactly, but it was something sacrilegious I guess. Probably he offended a Joss. Anyway he had to get out, and lost no time about it. He was in 'Frisco for a while, and the Tongs raised merry —— over him. Several attempts were made on his life, and Louey was driven out. Then he came here, and stood off his enemies pretty well while he grew rich and worked up a sort of bodyguard. I don't know how many people have been killed by him, or on his account, but anyway he

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has lived in comparative peace for the last few years.

"Now he is about ready to die, and though he will never pass out peacefully away from his own land that he hasn't seen for forty years or more, he dare not go back. They have pretty long memories in China, and what he did in that temple up in the Kwang-Tung province must be engraved on stone. The blight is on him and his kin even unto the ninety-ninth generation it seems; but it isn't as vigorous as it once was, because I happen to know the old chap has been buying up the curse at a pretty stiff figure for some years past. He figures now that if he can get that 'gator home to China, and duly presented to the priests, he will about wipe out the score, and can then get back and die like a gentleman.

"For months he has been trying to ship the brute—I guess it's to take the place of the extinct dragon, or he'll palm it off as one—but none of the mail-boats will handle the thing, and every junk-crew is scared of it, or of Louey's curse and won't listen to him. He's raised the price every time until there's quite a decent sum for the skipper who will give the big brute deck-space. I shouldn't think you would have any objections to an alligator, Morton?"

"Not me," said the skipper. "I've traded among the savage islands too long, and met too many missionized cannibals to lose any sleep over an alligator. Guess I'll go with you and meet up with the zoo proposition. I didn't just figure on headin' for Canton, but it can be made worth while."

Louey Yick was a parchment-faced, shriveled-up specimen of a Chinese; but as keen as a hack-saw. He greeted Ruthven cordially, and let his face slip when the trader told him Captain Morton was anxious to see his alligator, and might, as a great compliment, agree to take the brute to China.

"What's he like?" asked Morton.

"Velly ni' 'gator, alla same big lizzie. Captain he take him China makee plenty money. I pay fifty poun'," said Louey, eying the captain critically, to see what effect the price quoted had on him.

"Let's get acquainted with the circus first, old buck, before we talk terms, but make another guess at a startin' point for this deal. Where do you keep the menagerie?" asked Morton.

LOUEY led the white men through his store to the back. There he had the alligator tethered by the tail to a six-by-four stake, round which the brute had paddled a ring six inches deep with dust. The reptile was apparently asleep in the blazing sun with its nose buried in a puddle of mud that terminated the trickling stream from a near-by pump. Louey walked quickly to his back door, shoved his hand into a crate wherein half a dozen wobegone chickens were huddled in fear, and pulled out a scrawny rooster. The alligator blew a bubble of mud, and cautiously opened one eye.

The Chinaman rejoined the skipper and Ruthven. With a dexterous twist he deprived the screeching chicken of the few wing feathers it possessed, and flung it at the reptile's head. Like lightning, the brute shot up its long snout, opened its jaws, giving the spectators a fleeting view of its saw-like teeth, and brought them together again with a vicious snap which cut the hapless bird in halves.

"Holy smoke," cried Morton, "that's the deadliest brute I've seen. Say, Ruthven, your old professor of zoology has a kinder funny way of getting back to his Chinese heaven. I've got half a notion that monster will scoff half the priests that try to handle him, and will scare seven bells out of what's left alive. And I don't quite fancy that granny knot in the cable there, now I come to look at it. Say, Louey, is that the brute's bill of fare? Does he eat anythin' else?"

"Him velly fond dog; no dog steal chicken when 'gator about," and the old heathen grinned widely. "Captain take him? Yes? No?"

"Why, I wouldn't pack that brute on my schooner for five hundred dollars, and I ain't particular what I take in the way of cargo. You've heard that, I guess, Ruthven?"

"Some such rumor floats around among the islands," said the trader with a smile. "But say, Morton, I think you and your men between you, can crate that beast up good enough to get him over to China, and if you don't hit old Lou too hard, I guess he'll pay anything for the favor. Shall I make the bargain for you? It will oblige me greatly, and make old Louey think I'm no end of a good friend. I'll tell you why after. Here, Louey, Captain Morton will

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ship your alligator for you for one hundred and twenty pounds spot cash, and half a dozen crates of chickens. You can throw in a crate of dogs if you like, to make sure the brute won't be starved. Now don't haggle, because the Captain is a friend of mine and wouldn't do this for any one else. It's dirt cheap too, so just say the word."

"What if 'gator get lost?"

"Why, you old Jew, you've got to take that chance! If you don't, your alligator will stay here and eat your fortune up in chickens. Captain Morton will look after him all right. I'll go bail for that," said Ruthven. "You must have a big case made for him though, and help to get him aboard. Now, is that all fixed?"

Louey Yick agreed. Ruthven and Morton walked off in the direction of the club.

"Now look here, Morton," said Ruthven, as they walked through the one and only street of the Port, "I know what you're thinking of; but don't do it unless you can do it decently. If that brute gets lost except in a legitimate way, I'll be in a devil of a bad stew, besides losing the monopoly in sandalwood that this morning's job has given me. The old wreck back there has all the sandal-pullers by the wool, and his stinkin' old dog-eater is worth more in his eyes than all his wealth."

"I savvee, sort of passport to heaven. But don't you worry, young feller. Yours truly don't generally stand for any aspersions on his character——"

"Oh, shut up, Captain! I've cut my eye-teeth since we last met. What you do when you leave here doesn't concern me at all, and we don't want to quarrel about it," answered the Englishman, firing up. "All I want you to do, is to remember I put one hundred and twenty pounds in your pocket, and did you a good turn. You'll never land that alligator in China. I doubt whether you intend sailing for that country; but do me the favor of saving my face with the shipper."

"Say, Mr. Ruthven, you sure are kinder fresh to talk that way to Black Morton, but blow my bolt-ropes if I don't like you for it! Guess my shippin' papers exempt me from liability for fire, shipwreck, acts of God and piracy. There's a whole ocean of leeway for you. Jest you fix up the affair as you like with your foreign friend, and we'll quit in the mornin'! Now we're back at this thirst-dispensary of yours, let's liquor. Snakes!"

"What's wrong now?" asked Ruthven, as the skipper rapped it out.

"Why, nothin'; just a little business I forgot to mention to the keeper of the zoo. Guess that alligator scared it out of my think-box. Makin' a cautious allowance for the natural lyin' proclivities of this burg, and doublin' the sum which a Chow will plead guilty to possessin', what might be the taxable worth of Mr. Yick?"

Ruthven looked amazed, and studied Morton's face curiously. Seeing the skipper was in earnest, however, he thought a moment, and then answered:

"The old chap must be worth at least ten thousand pounds. He's had a great time here, and sandalwood has never been higher than it is now. Yes, I should say, that's a moderate estimate. What makes you so keen about his wealth? Oh, I forgot, too! You wanted the wealthiest Chink in Port Darwin. Well, you've met him. What on earth is the game you are playing in this God-forsaken hole anyway, Morton? Whatever it is, you want to get away infernally quick."

"A matter of some trade in a line you ain't interested in, son. Pearls! Guess I can talk business with Lou direct, when I meet him again. If not, it's his loss, not mine. Now I'll go see about my stores and water, and slip aboard. I've got your High Muckamuck booked for a souse on my ship this afternoon, and there's that armor-plated reptile to get berthed, too. Come along yourself, with the official outfit."

THE two men drained their glasses. Morton rose, passed a few words with some of the club-members he had met an hour earlier, and left the place. A few minutes later he was aboard the *Harriet Constance*. He cast a critical eye about the freshly scrubbed decks and the neatly coiled ropes, and called the mate. To Hawke he told the story of the alligator, and instructed him to arrange for its reception, with particular emphasis on the necessity for having the brute's head in a well-hitched bowline, its tail ditto. The skipper went on deck in time to see a boat put off from the landing-stage. She flew the blue ensign. Morton called his crew to the rail, and awaited the arrival of the Goverment Resident and staff.

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"Looks like the advance agent for a circus," grunted Captain Morton, as the boat drew alongside. Besides the Resident in his uniform, the skipper saw the figure of the Port's solitary policeman, whom he presumed to be chief of staff, the latter consisting of a Eurasian clerk, in a lawyer's wig and gown, and a nigger major-domo with a loin-cloth, a bright scarlet jacket and a bearskin busby. The pompous official was hoisted aboard, followed by his minstrel troupe. Morton bowed gravely, saluted, and bade them welcome. In the stuffy cabin, the Resident agreed to divest himself once more, on the Queen's birthday, of his official capacity; and the skipper, skilfully sweeping the table clear of cockroaches, which threatened to demolish the biscuits and cheese, broached a bottle of champagne which he had received with eleven others, as a parting gift from Sam House in Sydney. The exchange of compliments extended over three bottles, and the Resident took his departure on feet that strove valiantly to keep the deck from rising and smiting him. Morton assisted him over the side, and apologized profusely for the seeming discourtesy in not extending him a parting salute according to Cocker.

"Our ammunition is cleaned out," said Morton, "so if your Excellency ain't particular, we'll cut out the fireworks, and just dip the old rag."

"Not'all, not'all, Cap'n. Charmed 'm sure. Esselent wine, esselent. See you 'gain t'night."

The Resident flopped into his boat, waved his limp hand in an effort to salute, as the Stars and Stripes came down with a run, and was rowed away to sleep off the day's excitement.

"The silly old duck," said Morton, as he went below and carefully stowed the broken case of wine under his bunk. "Plain, this one-hoss place hasn't learned who I am yet; but, by snakes, it's about time some news was showin' up from Sydney, and guess it'll have this dump crazy, when it learns who its Big Chief has been honoring! Time for that museum-specimen to show up too. We jest ought to have that ugly beast lashed up proper, before we turn in to-night."

"Schooner ahoy!"

Morton stuck his head above the companionway and found a boat coming alongside with Ruthven in it, palpably excited.

"Chuck us a rope, skipper," yelled the Englishman, "and don't waste time. That's the style."

Morton tossed the rope, and Ruthven scrambled aboard.

"Look here, skipper," he said as he joined the master of the schooner and walked aft, "there's somebody else in this port who knows you, and doesn't like you. He saw you this morning, and the place is full of stories about you. By this time, I suppose they've decided you're here to cut all our throats and sack the bally place. I'm provedoring your schooner, so I'm in duty bound to have some communication with you; and to tell you the truth, I'm glad to get away from the questions that were being fired at me. Your blooming cargo will be alongside pretty soon, and my advice to you is, to get out as soon as you can. There's some talk about wiring down to Sydney, to look into your history. One of your boat's crew must have talked this morning. It's none of my business to see you held up; neither is it to inquire into what you've been doing lately, and particularly what brought you so far west, but I don't suppose they'll get a glowing testimonial to your character from Sydney, where I'll bet you're better known than liked."

"That so?" said Morton. "Well, let 'em nose out all they can. If that's the whole official outfit that has just left, after drinkin' twenty dollars' worth of the best champagne that ever sizzled over a parched gullet, it can't harm me any, and for two pins I'd go ashore and straighten the place out some."

"Don't be a fool, skipper. The Port is scared of you, I'll admit, now they know who you are, but don't think you've got an island trading-station to handle. They're a tough lot ashore. My advice is to get your goods and pack off. If the Resident is sober enough to give the word, they'll have a message down to Sydney within ten minutes of his arrival, and they'll come after you. And if it weren't for that —— alligator and getting in right with its owner, I'd say good luck to 'em.

"Here's your stores and water, and there comes the barge with the reptile. When you've signed up for the last-named, I've got the coin for the freight, less what you

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owe my concern; and you blow by, while the wind's favorable. My men can lend a hand to get the beast aboard, and when I see you run past the hill, I'll feel a bit better."

"Guess I'll go, Ruthven, but I'll take my time. Thanks for the tip-off you've given me. I'll remember it when I come back here some day, and teach this place manners. Bill, unshackle the peak haly'ds, fore and aft, and get all hands on that package comin' alongside. We'll stow that first. The other stuff won't want much handlin'."

The barge, with Louey Yick's peace-offering, made fast, and the work of hoisting two tons of wriggling alligator inboard was put under way.

II

THE Government Resident's cutter slid alongside the little pier. The crew dropped their oars, and assisted the staff in, safely landing the dignified but unsteady representative of Her Britannic Majesty. Half a score of excited citizens greeted him with excited questions; and, forgetting his official importance, imperatively demanded with one voice, that he place an embargo on the *Harriet Constance*, and prepare to resist an invasion in force.

"What's all the trouble? Constable, do your duty, disperse mob! If don't go quietly, read Riot Act," was all they got from the Resident, who proceeded leisurely toward his house followed by a select deputation from the citizens. The Vice-President of the Progress Association informed the chief official that the port was harboring a notorious character, whom they had every reason to believe had designs on the town; and though international courtesy had demanded that he be hospitably received while he was believed to be a well-conducted mariner, the information since made available, rendered it necessary that some inquiry should be made.

"Rot," said the Resident, "Morton's good fellow, no harm at all. What do you know about him anyway?"

"Well," said the spokesman, "we don't know anything definite, except he's got a bad reputation, but we think it's up to you to find out more. He's come from Sydney, not so long back, and it's a safe thing to make some inquiries there. At least we think so, and whether you do so or not, we're goin' to. That's plain."

"There you are," replied the Resident, with a superior smile on a sobering face. "Morton's from Sydney, therefore he's all right or they wouldn't let him out. All moonshine, this scare. You fellows want to drag me into inter-er-national embroglio. He's my official guest. I'll do nothing."

"Then we will!"

And with that parting shot, the deputation cleared off to the cable-station, and sent off a message, composed after much argument, asking if the *Harriet Constance* and her skipper were known, and whether the papers she held were in order. While waiting the answer, the party adjourned to the club, and discussed the whole situation over many drinks. The discussion and the drinks worked up a desperate state of affairs which the quiet Port faced, and a score of strategic plans were laid for resisting the attack every one agreed would be made that night.

The big telescope, usually focussed on the far point beyond which Port Darwinians were wont to look for the first sight of an expected vessel, was directed at the schooner, and every eye peeped through on to her decks, where the skipper and his crew were still busily making Louey Yick's alligator comfortable. An hour passed. The sun sank low, and the stillness of the tropics fell upon the little settlement. A watcher at the telescope saw Ruthven put off in his boat from the schooner, and duly announced it. Then he broke the news that sail was being made on the *Harriet Constance*.

"What's that?" the company cried in chorus.

"Morton's preparing to leave. There goes his tops'l."

There was a rush for the telescope. At that moment, in burst a messenger from the cable-station, frantically waving a telegram.

"Here it is!" he yelled; "this'll make the Resident sit up! Morton's a —— thief, a pirate, and a blackbirder. The Sydney people want us to hold him."

The Vice-President of the Progress Association was duly placed in possession of the telegram:

American schooner *Harriet Constance*, Morton, Master, charged by French Consul, acts of piracy. Other complaints pending. Government Resident fully advised.

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"That settles it," said the Vice-President of the P. A. "Now we'll see what this cocksure big-wig is going to do. Hello, Ruthven, heard the news?"

"No," replied the Englishman, who came in at that moment. "Anything new about the Yankee? You fellows had him tied and hanged, when I left you a couple of hours ago. What's the excitement now?"

"Why, man alive, this fellow's a regular cutthroat, and here's our fat-headed Resident been boozing with him, and entertaining him like a lord, just because Morton fired a salute and called on him. Look at this."

Ruthven read the telegram, and gazed at the speaker.

"Well, what are you chaps going to do about it?"

"Do? We're going to put that up to the Resident. He's got to act now. Even if Morton don't intend to raid this place, he's a fugitive from justice; and as law-abiding citizens, tryin' to keep these parts clear of his kind, who are much too plentiful, it's our place to lay hold of him."

"Then you've got to stir yourselves, and look out you don't get hurt," said Ruthven. "I've learned something about this fellow from his own lips, that I never knew before, and though Morton was a decent enough chap when I was in the Pacific—at least he was no worse than a good many more—he's likely to prove a tough handful for you fellows. He's going out on the flood, to-night, and I've got an idea he'll get away all right."

"We'll see about that, Ruthven. Let's see the Resident," and the club was emptied in a second.

THE Resident was volubly excited when the party called on him, and was shouting orders to his "staff."

"The infernal scoundrel," he yelled, "to think of him imposing on me! On me of all people! I swear you all in as special constables to assist, if necessary, in the arrest of Theophilus H. Morton, otherwise Black Morton, and the detention of the ship *Harriet Constance*," he raised his hand, and augmented his police force with a wave of it.

"Gentlemen," he added, "this man Morton, who has imposed upon us all this day, is charged with divers crimes on the high seas, and in the territorial waters of a friendly power. In plain words, gentlemen, he is a pirate and has been guilty of assisting convicts to escape from the French settlement of New Caledonia. The complaint was lodged in Sydney only to-day, on the arrival of the long-overdue French mail-boat, and I have instructions to hold him, pending the arrival of a warship. As the true character of the man was not known in Sydney till to-day, we may excuse ourselves for having been misled into treating him as an honorable visitor. Constable, here is your warrant. Proceed to execute it," and he indicated the way to the pier.

"Well, of all the cool cheek," said Ruthven, "that fellow has it."

"Hasn't he though!" exclaimed the Vice-President of the Progress Association. "Imposed upon! All of us! Why the blithering idiot simply fell over himself when the Yankee fired that salute, and hailed him as a brother. Another bottle of wine and he'd have kissed him. Anyway, we've got him stirred up now. Come on."

The party charged down to the pier, and tumbled into the waiting boats, the lone constable taking charge of the attack on the schooner, which lay head on to the mild breeze off the land. Her topsails were set, and her mainsails swung in the topping lifts. To the ears of those in the rapidly approaching boats came the clank of the capstan-pawls, as the cable was hauled in.

"Lay into it, men, or he'll get away!" cried the excited policeman, fearing that the capture of the year was about to escape him. "Schooner ahoy!"

"Belay there," sounded a stentorian voice from the forecastle head.

The windlass stopped with the anchor almost broken from the harbor bottom. In the gathering dusk, Morton stepped to the rail, and answered the challenge:

"Hello, fish-face, what's the occasion for this call?"

"In the Queen's name, stand," called the policeman. "I'm coming aboard with a warrant for the arrest of you and your ship. I caution you not to move your vessel."

"That's nice an' interestin', old sport. Come aboard on the port quarter, and bring your friends. There seems a tarnation big bunch of you to handle one little ship and one lone ship-master, but you're

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welcome. As for movin' my ship, why, she sails from this [mudhole] in just fifteen minutes. Maybe it'll be useful to you to know how an American gets under way. Come aboard."

Morton gave hurried orders to the mate, who was squatted on top of the crate containing Louey Yick's alligator, and a message in Kanaka to the colored hands at the capstan. Then he stepped to the rail and watched the first boat, with the policeman, make fast to the dangling rope. The policeman, revolver in hand, came scrambling up the side of the schooner. Morton leaned out, grabbed him by the belt with one hand, to assist him, and with the other, jerked the weapon from his hand and tossed it into the water.

"There's no need for shootin' irons on my vessel, 'specially when you come on a peaceful job sech as libelin' the *Harriet Constance*," he said; "guess the foremast will do you. Lash your warrant there, accordin' to statute made and provided."

The policeman found himself propelled violently in the direction indicated. Hard on his heels, up the rope, clambered the other members of the boat's crew, but Morton disarmed every man, as he came aboard, with the exception of the Vice-President of the Progress Association. That gentleman was slow and portly. His gun was still in his pocket, and he had barely started the ascent of the schooner's sides, when the other three men picked themselves off the deck, and rushed at the skipper; while a fourth, still nursing a bloody nose, which Morton had to smite, seized a slat of wood, and staggered forward. Morton turned in an instant, and drove them back at the point of his revolver.

THE moment's respite gave him time to attend to the Vice-President, who fumbled for his revolver with one hand and swung from the vessel's rail by the other. He got the weapon out, but the skipper was too quick. His big fist caught the only armed man under the ear, before the trigger was pulled, and the deputy constable flopped into the water. The sudden immersion restored him to consciousness, and he yelled a warning to the second boat, which dashed to the starboard bow, its occupants firing wildly, while they hooked on and prepared to clamber aboard.

"Give it 'em, boys!" cried Morton, and the Kanakas, yelling with delight, up-ended a quarter sack of flour, grabbed from Ruthven's stores on the deck, and shot its contents down on the upturned faces in the boat. There was a volley of oaths, but the shooting subsided, and the boat drew off.

"Now, gents," said the skipper, as he faced his captives, his finger flicking the trigger of his weapon, "I'm a man of my word. No shootin' irons on this craft, unless I carry 'em myself. I invited you aboard, peaceful and quiet. You've brought this trouble on yourselves, by attackin' my ship in a feerocious, menacin' manner, quite unnecessary. That kinder business don't go with Captain Morton. No, sirs. If any man wants nice gentle treatment, he'll find me mild as the dove from the ark. If he wants fight, why, he's goin' to get a stomach full when he bucks me aboard my own craft. I don't like surprise-parties. Now what's it all about? Speak up, officer."

"You murderin' bloody-fisted cutthroat!" shouted the policeman, backing before Morton's advance. "I have a warrant for your arrest and the detention of your ship, on a charge of felony in the waters of a friendly power. When I get you ashore, I'll lay another charge of assault and battery, resistin' arrest, and felonious intent. I again call on you in the Queen's name to submit, and come ashore as my prisoner."

"Say, son, you're rather free with the old lady's name. If she's to be dragged into this riot, guess the President of the United States won't mind takin' a deal too. In the name of the President, and the Governor of the State of California, 'Frisco bein' my port of register, get off my deck. If that don't shift you, why stay, an' ye'll go the way I want you too, when I've got time to manhandle you." Morton side-stepped the party and sprang on to the poop. "Heave on that capstan, Tommy," he yelled to the native in charge of the forecastle. "Stand by your toppin' lifts, come in on the main-sheets, an' shove the helm hard-a-port."

He also shouted something to the mate, who sat, a silent spectator of the way in which his skipper handled a boarding-party, while his heels dangled within a few inches of the sniffing snout of the alligator, safely caged in the waist of the schooner. The

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crew sprang to their stations. The capstan clanked as the Kanakas heaved and chanted. Morton lent a hand with the slack of the after-sheet. The little group of landsmen hesitated a moment, and then in concert, made a rush for the poop, arming themselves with staves and belaying-pins, as they ran. Morton's back straightened in an instant, and his gun barked. The policeman's arm swung limply from the shoulder, and the belaying-pin he had poised for a shot, clattered to the deck.

"Back, the lot of you," roared Morton, "or I'll blow you as full of holes as a cullender! Off my ship you get!"

"Not on your life!" replied the valiant policeman. "Rush him, boys! Here come the others."

A yell from the forecastle-head told Morton that the anchor was aboard. Another warned him that the second section of the boarding-party was following the mud-hook over the bows. The Kanakas stood them off with the capstan-bars, while the anchor was made fast and the head-sails began to fill. Then they dived through the hatchway and took refuge in the forecastle. The moment had come for the trump trick without a stain of murder darkening the schooner's decks on this occasion.

"Let 'er go, Bill, an' jump for your life!" bellowed the skipper, as he threw the schooner's head round.

The mate gave a kick at the hinged door of the crate on which he sat. It banged down on the deck. With a run, Bill reached the stern end of the cage, gave the scaley inmate a vicious prod in the rear with a boat-hook, and bolted like a monkey up the rings of the mainsail. Squealing, the alligator dashed from his cage, turned with a jerk that sent his tail like a flail against the bulwarks, and charged the group clambering over the forecastle.

They lost no time in reaching their boat. The reptile turned at the forecastle stairway, sniffed a moment and apparently scenting humans in another direction, shuffled along the decks aft, to where the first of the attacking party stood, still menacing the skipper. The clatter of the brute's claws gave them bare warning of the impending danger, but it was sufficient. The policeman cleared the rail with one bound, and almost before he hit the water, one of his companions was on top of him.

The third man sprang at the boom as it swung overhead, caught his hands in the sail lashing, and pulled himself up with the agility and expertness of a trained gymnast, just as the ugly animal brought its jaws together with a snap. There he lay in the belly of the sail, scared to death, and as still as a treed 'possum hugging a sheltering bough. The fate of the remaining member of the expedition seemed tragically fixed, as he stood with his back to the raised poop, gazing spellbound at the charging reptile.

Morton held the sheet by a half turn round a cleat, but he let it go with a run, and threw himself at the man standing like a statue within a dozen feet of the alligator's snout. With one jerk he hoisted the fellow on to the poop, barely gave him time to realize that he had escaped sudden death, and stiffening his arm once more, dropped him gently overboard with a second jerk. Simultaneously the boom brought up hard when the mainsheet ran to the Turk's head through the block, and the last member of the attacking party catapulted out of his hiding-place into the scum of the schooner's way.

WITH a joyous laugh, Morton came in on the sheet, made it fast on the cleat, and dexterously dropped a running noose over the snapping jaws of the beast at his feet.

"All clear, Bill!" he yelled to the mate, as he took a turn with the rope around a stanchion, and heaved on it till he had the alligator's nose hard up against the stairway, its tail lashing furiously. "Slip aft and get a line round this brute's rudder. We'll keep him, Bill. He'll be useful some other time, I guess."

Morton avoided the sweep of the reptile's tail, went below to the signal locker, and when next he stood on the poop, the *Harriet Constance* was under Signal Head. From her flag-halyards fluttered the message:

"Farewell. Many happy returns of the day."

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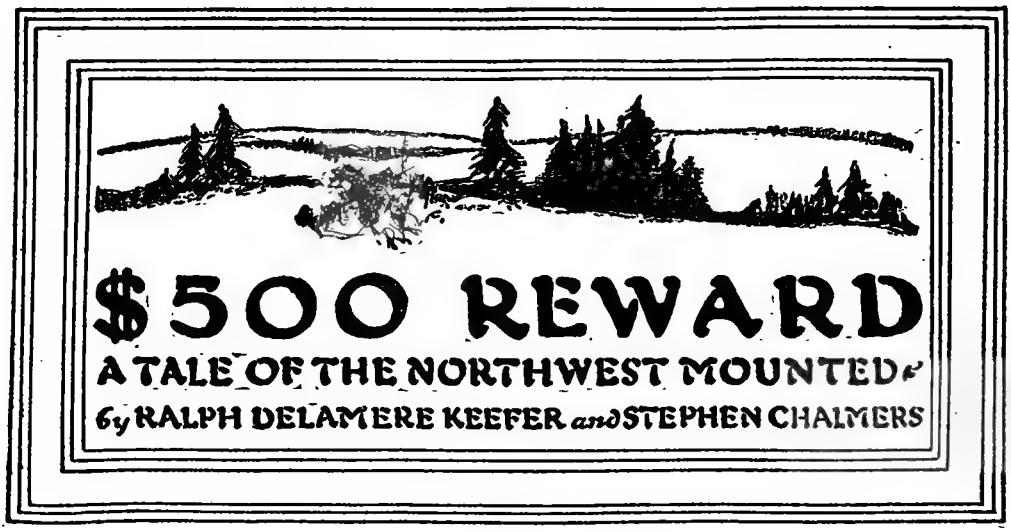

$500 REWARD

A TALE OF THE NORTHWEST MOUNTED

by RALPH DELAMERE KEEFER and STEPHEN CHALMERS

BREAKFAST was over at the Lower Laberge Detachment, Yukon Territory, and the cook was at the back door, dividing the remains of a saucepanful of congealed porridge among a snarling rabble of Alaska dogs.

Young Jack Blount, constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, stood in the middle of the floor, buckling on his revolver-belt over his fur-trimmed "parkee" and listening to the final instructions of the weather-beaten Sergeant.

"And when you get to Upper Laberge," the Sergeant was saying, "give my love to Forty-Mile Grainger and tell him I hear there's to be an inspection of detachments.

"Here's the Dawson mail," he continued, handing Blount a bulky package, "and here," producing a slip of paper, "is a little billy-doo the El Dorado Trading-Company has sent down the line. Better look it over yourself, then pass it on to Forty-Mile."

Constable Jack cast his eye leisurely down the page, which had "$500 Reward" printed in big black type across the top.

"Huh!" said he. "Seem to want him bad, Sergeant. 'For embezzlement. Antoine Le Beau. Black hair and eyes, full beard, stout, with smooth appearance. Ears pierced for earrings.' Um! Bet he's a cute-looking thing, Sergeant."

"The price he's worth looks a blamed sight cuter to me," grumbled the Sergeant, tugging at an unwilling boot.

"There!" he gasped as the boot slipped on. "Now hit the trail, m'lad. Nobody's asked you to stay to lunch. A few more of you loafers stopping over on patrol and we'll be down to dog-salmon here. Mush along, sonny—mush along!"

BLOUNT laughed boyishly, for he was gorged to repletion on the Sergeant's porridge, tea and flapjacks. He slammed the detachment door after him and presently slid down the incline to the level of the lake. Then he struck out for Upper Laberge with the long splayfoot gait of the snow-shoer.

From White Horse, which was the head of navigation on the Yukon, the Winter trail ran down the winding course of the river to Dawson City, a distance of about four hundred miles. The trail cut corners where the stream took too pronounced a curve, but in general it kept to the frozen surface of the river, a natural highway which is one of the few concessions of Nature to man in the Northwest.

The route was broken into stages of about thirty miles in length, each stage being marked by a relay-station of the El Dorado Transportation Company, a road-house and a detachment of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, which kept watch and ward over the trail, patrolling the intervals between detachments.

Of these patrols the one on Lake Laberge was the most unpopular. From Upper Laberge to Lower is about thirty-two miles.

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The lake is half that distance in width and the trail runs down the middle of it. The whole frozen body is hemmed in by a vastness of desolate mountains framing a sheeted plain.

It was Forty-Mile Grainger who remarked that the scenery was discouraging to any one who had hitherto regarded himself as the noblest work of God. One may travel for hours without a hint of progress being given by those mighty brooding peaks as they gaze down in unchanging aloofness. But others besides Forty-Mile have remarked this quality of the Winter Yukon —this breathless, frozen quiet, this tense expectant waiting—for what? The Day of Judgment, perhaps, when she shall yield up the battered remains of those who have been lured to her treacherous frozen bosom.

But there was nothing at all depressing in the scene to Constable Jack Blount as he left Lower Laberge and skirted the lake.

It was a frosty day. The morning was far enough advanced for the sun to be bathing the Western peaks with rose-red. The air was clear and bracing and the constable was young—still young enough for each glittering mountain to be the imagined harbor of some relic of the primitive past, or some mine of fabulous wealth; and the sunlit, sparkling trail stretched ahead with endless golden possibilities.

As he pushed forward on his snow-shoes he insensibly drifted through varying degrees of day-dreaming to the one that haunts all exiles—the dream of Going Home. To walk up the elm-shaded street of that little Eastern town some warm Spring evening—in full uniform, of course —and turn in through the old familiar gate up the path to the vine-covered porch——!

"I'd knock at the door like a stranger!" he chuckled. He was only twenty-one, was Constable Jack Blount. "No! I'd walk in and take them all by surprise."

Then came the vision of the Girl and her strange, shy greeting. Or would she cry out his name and his arms be filled with sudden millinery? Heigh-ho! But they were dear companions of the trail, those day-dreams. Some of us who were Blount's fellows know how dear.

"I've served long enough to get furlough," muttered Blount, awaking from the dream to the practical. "But the price? No have got! It would take three hundred."

THE spreading glare of the sun on the white field forced him to close his dazzled eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, the purple patches wheeling about his vision slowly focused themselves into a little black speck on the trail ahead.

Constable Jack Blount rubbed his eyes. Optical illusions were common in the everlasting snows, but presently he was convinced that the speck ahead was a man—possibly a comrade.

"It's funny I didn't see him before," he muttered.

As he quickened his steps to overtake the figure, the mystery of its sudden appearance was solved. There was a juncture with the trail of a line of snow-shoe prints leading in from the old Hootchi Cut-Off on the right-hand shore. Blount had thought that trail impassable.

The stranger was mushing along at a stiff pace, his head down and his arms swinging. It took half an hour of hard traveling through the deep snow before the constable ranged alongside.

"How do, stranger!" Blount hailed, panting.

At the unexpected voice in the wilderness the stranger shied like a startled jackrabbit. He whirled around on Constable Blount with frightened alacrity. He gasped out an inarticulate word, suspiciously like a curse. But, pulling himself together with an obvious effort, he returned the other's greeting with some show of enthusiasm.

He was a puffy-cheeked, olive-tinted individual with a week-old stubble of beard on his chin. His small black eyes were alive with restless suspicion. He was still nervous as he spoke to Blount, but more than half concealed it behind a very disarming unctuousness of manner.

"How do you do, officer," he remarked, apparently having noted the inch of yellow stripe on Blount's breeches between the bottom of his "parkee" and the top of his stockings. "A beautiful day. I perceive you are going my way. I am sure your company will afford me a great deal of—ah—gratification."

He smiled benignly upon Constable Jack, who felt abashed by this Chesterfieldian politeness.

"Afraid I scared you some," he ventured by way of apology, pacing abreast of the

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stranger, who was swinging forward again with his rapid snow-shoe stride.

"My dear young man," replied the other in a rounded, oratorical manner, "it is most certainly my place to apologize for the abruptness of my demeanor when you accosted me. But I am constitutionally nervous, and imagining myself alone in 'these wilds traversed by few'—— You understand?"

He smiled in a deprecating manner, as if amused at his own weakness.

"Too bad, isn't it?" said Constable Jack Blount, vaguely sympathetic. Nevertheless, he dropped a few paces behind the affable stranger so that he would not have the unenviable task of breaking trail.

"Yes, a most unfortunate affliction," said the Chesterfield of the snows, and lapsed into a silence that was tinged with interesting melancholy.

"You're a parson, aren't you, sir?" inquired Blount after a while.

"Why—ah—no," said the stranger, a shade of hesitation in his tone. "That is to say—I have been engaged for a number of years in—er—in instilling moral precepts into the minds of the—the aboriginal Siwash tribes.

"But I am not," he added, in a more assured tone, "a regularly ordained minister of the gospel. Alas!"

He heaved a sigh of profound regret, but presently went on:

"I strive, however, in so far as I may, to emulate the noble example of that self-sacrificing band of workers who are seeking to ameliorate the condition of their lesser brethren by the—ah—inculcation of moral and religious standards, as well as by—ah—judicious eleemosynary measures."

"Sounds fine!" said Constable Jack Blount, grinning with delight behind the affable stranger's broad back. "I suppose you come from Dawson?"

The Chesterfield of the snows knelt down to tighten a thong of his snow-shoes. The question must have escaped him. Blount repeated it. The man straightened up slowly and darted a slight glance at the policeman.

"Yes," said he, taking the trail once more, "I rested in Dawson for a short time after my labors among the Creeks. I am at present on my way to Vancouver, where I expect to deliver a series of lectures illustrating the deplorable conditions among the Siwashes, for the purpose of raising funds for the erection of a mission to promote social intercourse and—ah—Christian good fellowship among the inconglomerate elements of Dawson and, by palliating racial differences, weld them into a cohesive and harmonious whole."

The satisfaction with which the pious gentleman rolled forth these sounding phrases was equaled only by the delight with which Constable Blount heard them.

But suddenly the latter was struck by a seemingly preposterous thought. What first suggested it he could never tell, but the grin slowly faded from his face and he stared at the back of the man ahead of him.

How did that description of the El Dorado embezzler go? "Black hair and eyes, full beard, stout, with smooth appearance——"

It all tallied, except for the beard. That, of course, could be, and undoubtedly had been, shaved off for disguise. Constable Jack Blount edged up nearer the snow-shoer ahead, intent upon examining the head more closely for that final mark of identification, the ears pierced for earrings.

The man had them!—a minute puckered depression in the lobe of each ear!

CONSTABLE JACK BLOUNT'S heart leaped with exultation. But could it be possible that one so full of ingratiating sentiments and lofty ideals was nothing more than a vulgar criminal? that a man who exuded righteousness at every pore could be a whited sepulcher?

Gradually the policeman's incredulity vanished, and he saw only a vision of five hundred dollars upon a background of Home!

"And they say dreams go by contrary!" he muttered, hitching the butt of his revolver to a handier position.

For a hundred yards or more the two men continued their splayfoot march in silence, but it was a silence fraught with the wildest excitement, for one at least. To Jack Blount that hypocritical figure ahead had become a sinister thing; yet—no! That figure was more like the game the hungry hunter has yearned for days to see through his sights. It represented the gratification of that hunger which was gnawing at the young man's senses; the longing to go Home.

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As he slowly drew his revolver from its holster, the vision shone bright in the tomorrow ahead. In full uniform, at the door. His mother would open it and he would stand at salute while his identity slowly crept into her dear old heart and mind. And his father, the old man who spent his days reading Dickens by the fireside—how he would smile with pride in his big soldierly son come home from the great Northwest!

And Constable Jack could almost see the expression of his young brother's face at the tales he would have to tell of his adventures, and this greatest adventure of them all, the capture of Antoine LeBeau!

Then—the Girl!——

"Steady, boy, steady!" he muttered. This was no time for soft dreams. He must be hard as nails, as merciless as the law which urged him to do his duty without sentiment.

But—five hundred dollars reward—and Home! It stiffened his nerve and muscle and he leveled the revolver at the man ahead of him.

"Antoine Le Beau!" he cried sternly, "I arrest you in the name of the King!"

And that is where Constable Jack Blount made his great mistake. He was thirteen miles from Lower Laberge detachment, nineteen from Upper. He was alone with a probably desperate man, and there were no witnesses of what might happen, save the silent, sneering, white-swathed peaks and the frozen sheet of the lake.

The affable stranger spun around as sharply as his snow-shoes would permit. His face was twisted with rage and one hand slipped to his pocket.

"Keep that hand out of your pocket!" commanded Blount, moving the muzzle of the service revolver a step nearer. "Up with it—both of them!"

"*Sacr-r-rê!*" snarled Le Beau, like a tiger. "You go to ——!"

The mask of benevolence had fallen from him. The buried hand leaped from his pocket and there was an object in it which he whirled high above his head.

He struck at Blount before the other could fire. The constable leaped aside. Even then the heavy object in Le Beau's hand came in contact with the right side of his head, glanced off, tearing his ear, and descended with terrific force upon his shoulder.

The weight of the object and the force of the blow jerked the sand-bag—for that is what it seemed to be—from Le Beau's hand. It fell in the snow a little to Blount's right. Before the embezzler could recover it, Constable Jack had rallied.

"Halt or I fire!" he cried, swaying dizzily.

Le Beau was desperate. He suddenly turned and, with a curse, went floundering toward the left shore of the lake, his arms swinging and his snow-shoes flopping wildly.

"I've got to kill him," muttered Constable Jack, taking aim at the flying figure, which seemed all at once to be everywhere but between the sights.

At the same time the world became an inferno of loud thunders and the snow turned red before the policeman's eyes.

"I'm going!" was Blount's thought.

With the last flicker of consciousness he exerted his will to press the trigger. He heard the explosion of the service-revolver. Then he sank into a gloom, out of which he seemed to hear a voice crying with infinite weariness and regret:

"And I might have gone Home!"

II

IN A trapper's hut, long since abandoned, some eight miles from the scene of the fight and on the right shore of the lake, Constable Forty-Mile Grainger was frying flapjacks in an atmosphere filled with the aroma of bacon fat.

Grainger was attached to the Upper Laberge detachment and his patrol extended half-way down the lake toward Lower Laberge. The hut was the turning point and a favorite place for rest and refreshment. Forty-Mile calculated that if Blount came up the lake that morning with the despatches he would have a hot flapjack for his detachment partner and some human company on the eleven-mile mush back to Upper Laberge.

Grainger was big, and blond, and his handsome face was stamped with an unusual commingling of virility, refinement and humor. With his parkee removed and his sleeves rolled up over the flapjack-pan he looked what he was—a full-grown lion.

Presently Forty-Mile Grainger laid down his turning-knife and went to the door. Shading his eyes against the blinding snow-sun, he stared out upon the lake and chuckled. Constable Jack Blount was coming.

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Forty-Mile was about to return to speedier manufacture of flapjacks when his attention was arrested by something unusual in Blount's gait.

It was worse than the usual semi-drunken sway of the snow-shoer.

"It's no canteen gait either," muttered Forty-Mile, and he went to get his field-glass.

"Boy's all in," said he, aloud, when he had taken a long look.

He reëntered the shack, slipped on his parkee and strapped on his snow-shoes. Five minutes later the big fellow strode out over the lake in the direction of the staggering Blount.

Within a mile of the hut Constable Jack paused, swayed and rubbed his eyes. He seemed to see that rescue was at hand, for he suddenly waved his left hand—the right arm swung helplessly at this side—and dropped in a heap. The fall almost buried his body in the snow, but Forty-Mile kept his eyes fixed on a little dark spot on the white plain and forged ahead with greater speed.

When he reached the side of the unconscious man, he gave merely one glance at the torn ear and the blood-soaked head and shoulder.

"Humph!" he grunted, heaving the lad up his arms and sliding him into position around his back and neck.

Without another sound he swung with his burden toward the hut. He was breathing heavily when he deposited Blount on the floor before the rusty, smoky stove. But he did not pause to rest. He tore the snow-shoes from the young constable's feet, removed his moccasins and socks, then dosed him liberally from a flask.

"And I might ha' gone Home," muttered Blount, opening his eyes.

"There's tea and flapjacks," said Forty-Mile, smiling down into the blood-stained pallor of the face. "What happened, Jack?"

"Le Beau," said Blount feebly, but with a world of bitterness.

"Don't know the frog."

Blount groped with numb fingers for his wallet.

"In there with the mail," said he. "Five hundred—dollars—r'ward."

Forty-Mile extracted the contents of the wallet. He laid aside the Dawson mail and glanced over the El Dorado advertisement. He saw the situation at a glance.

"So. You met the gentleman and lost out. Well, that happens to the best of us. Cheer up. There's credit in placing his whereabouts, anyway. We'll close in from White Horse, Livingstone Creek and Kynock. Don't worry about that."

"But that isn't it!" cried Jack Blount, the liquor warming his blood and stimulating his feverish brain. "I'm a rotter—a slabsided rotter—that's what *I* am!"

"Easy, lad, easy," Forty-Mile Grainger cautioned, as Blount sat up and began to pound his own head with his fist.

"Easy—yes, *too* easy! To let a frog-eating, fat-faced, sanctimonious windbag of a Cheechawker buffalo me like that! And I might ha' gone Home! Do you understand that, Forty-Mile? I might ha' gone HOME!"

"Still feeling that way?" said Grainger softly. He had sat many a night at the detachment listening to the lad's descriptions of the Home dream. "You'll get over it."

"You don't understand!" cried Blount, with a queer split in his voice. "You don't understand. I was just thinking about it—about the mater and the old man—and—and the Girl—when the good God put that man—five hundred dollars cash!—put him in my hands, mind you, and I—and I——"

"So?" said Forty-Mile, and over his face came an expression of understanding and pity. "You poor devil!"

"Don't pity me!" pleaded Blount, and tears of weakness and chagrin and exhaustion were running down his cheeks. "It was my chance and I just wasn't good enough. Five hundred dollars in my hands! And he had no gun, nothing but a measly sand-bag—and it's all I've got for my pains!"

He drew the sand-bag from the breast of his parkee and dropped it with a thump on the floor. Next minute he was doubled up with his head on his knees, sobbing like a little boy.

He was only twenty-one, and his head was queer from the blow.

Forty-Mile Grainger stood over him, his mouth working oddly. He glanced from the miserable figure to the sinister bag on the floor. All at once his jaw set and his eyes gleamed dangerously.

There was silence in the hut for a few minutes. Then Grainger stood up, after tightening the thongs of his snow-shoes.

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"I understand, boy," he said, examining the cylinder of his service-gun. "I'll take a turn around. You'll feel better in a while. Then turn to and make a fresh batch of flapjacks."

THE door of the shack closed after him and he strode away on Blount's backtrail, his eyes fixed on the snow and his mouth working with a slight chewing movement.

"I'll bring you back, M'sieu Le Beau!" he muttered. "That boy's going *Home!*"

Five minutes after Grainger went out, Blount lifted his head with a curse. He felt ashamed of his emotion, but—it—it was mighty hard. He was glad it had been Forty-Mile and nobody else. He sometimes felt that Forty-Mile had a home somewhere and had moments when he hankered after—somebody. But nobody ever knew what Forty-Mile's secret was. None knew why he had come among us in the Northwest.

Constable Jack Blount pulled himself together. He washed the blood from his head, limbered his arm a bit and took another mouthful from the flask that Grainger had left on the floor beside him. Then he did his best with a fresh batch of flapjacks.

But every now and then the irony of the morning's events came back upon him with a rush. Then he would stop and fight back the emotions that tore his soul. The five hundred dollars that would have taken him back to the Girl and Home seemed to dance mockingly in the air wherever he looked. He was suffering from a slight concussion, and the room was full of dancing spots.

Noon passed. He ate some of the flapjacks and drank some tea. Still Forty-Mile did not return. He went outside to look for him. He could see no human being on the white plain. Oddly enough, he could see no trail but his own. Where was Grainger's? It was a painful puzzle, but his brain was too addled to reason it out.

When he went back into the hut his eyes fell on the sand-bag. With a bitter curse he picked it up and cried:

"Your five hundred dollars!"

He weighed it in his hand.

"Shot!" he muttered. "Would ha' killed me if he had landed it square and fair. I s'pose I ought to be thankful for that—which I'm not!"

He examined the bag. It was what miners call a "poke," made of buckskin and tied at the top with a thong. Blount untied the thong and turned the bag upside down.

Crash! Jingle!

A prodigious quantity of gold coin avalanched to the floor and individual pieces tinkled and rolled into the four corners of the room.

Constable Jack Blount stared for a dazed moment. Then he gave a yell.

"Sand-bagged with a poke stuffed with bullion!" he cried, dropping on his knees and frantically gathering up the money. For five minutes he was scurrying around the floor on hands and knees, like a dog after a rat, perspiration streaming from his face as he hunted for hidden gold-pieces and returned them to a pile in front of the stove.

When the last piece was recovered, he squatted on the floor and stared at the astonishing thing, while he smoothed the empty poke across his knee.

Then the temptation leaped into his brain. He counted up the stuff. There were one hundred and forty-two five-dollar gold-pieces.

"Seven hundred and ten dollars!" muttered Blount. "I could—I could go Home on that. ——! I could buy myself out for good!"

He ran his hands feverishly through the coins, then sprang to his feet and rushed to the door. Forty-Mile Grainger was not in sight. Forty-Mile Grainger did not know. He would tell Forty-Mile, but—— Something whispered "no." Forty-Mile might not—understand.

With a glow of cunning in his eyes, Constable Jack Blount came back to the pile of gold and dropped on his knees beside it. Madly he poured the stuff back into the poke and tied it tight, so tight that it would not give forth a telltale chink. Then he stuffed it in his breast and sat down to think.

Again the dream. The pleasant streets of that old town came before his mind's eye. He heard the church bells ring and heard the drone of the organ. He found himself pretending to sing the lines of a hymn while his truant eyes wandered to the brown-gold hair of the Girl in the pew ahead. He heard his mother's whispered "Amen," and presently he was shaking

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hands with all the townspeople out on the gravel-drive before the little church. Then they all went home to dinner, and over the steaming roast he saw the dear familiar faces, and heard the old man say grace.

The poke of gold was burning against his breast. It was his! Nobody knew. There was only one who might ask. Forty-Mile Grainger. And Forty-Mile could testify it was a sand-bag. What became of it? He had thrown it away. He was not well. The blow on the head. The sight of the ironic thing maddened him. It was out there, of course; lost in the depth of the big snows.

And he would go Home.

It was only the thought of Forty-Mile Grainger that hurt. Big, clean Forty-Mile, who couldn't tell a lie, to whom you could not lie if once his steady gray eyes fell upon you. Could he lie to Forty-Mile, the man to whom he had poured out his very soul in the long white nights; the man he looked up to with all the envy and respectful awe of a mere lad?

Then, too, there was his honor as a constable of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. If he stultified that honor, could he go Home and hold up his head as having been a member of that clean, virile body of men?

And that brought him to Home again. The sweet salt of a kiss seemed to touch his lips, the dear appeal of the fireside circle. There was no end to this life, none but shattered health and nothing-a-month and the canteen. His people were poor. Another year and he could leave. What then? Enter as a mere beginner into some new sphere of life, an apprentice with his juniors for superiors?

No, he would keep the money. It would help him to a new start. Principally and primarily—it would take him Home.

But——

The afternoon passed slowly, and still he sat there before the stove. He was unaware that the fire was out and the arctic cold was creeping up from his feet. His blood was aflame. His left hand clutched the poke in his breast and he was all unconscious of the dull throb of his injured shoulder and head. . . . . .

Suddenly he stirred and looked around him. It was a miserable place to be in and the silence was appalling. It was typical of the comfortless life of the great Northwest, but it was fraught with an old thought that had never seemed so new as now.

His honor as a man, the kind of honor that made Forty-Mile Grainger something bigger and better than the rest of the crowd. He would tell Forty-Mile about it some day and the big fellow's smile would be reward enough and compensation for what he had given up.

HE SLOWLY took the poke of gold from his breast and laid it in the middle of the floor. Then he arose, took his side-arms from the nail where Forty-Mile had hung them, and laid the armed belt in a clasped circle around the money. He stood off and looked at it, and he nodded his head bravely but grimly.

That buckle, those service arms, they were as the guardian arm of the King. They were the symbol of his honor as a man and a servant of the King. That belt was the sacred circle, the line impassable.

The door quietly opened and Forty-Mile Grainger came in from the swift-gathering winter dusk. The big fellow stood curiously watching Constable Jack Blount, who was studying his queer little grouping on the floor.

"Well?" said Forty-Mile.

Blount started. Then he colored deeply and pointed a trembling finger at the poke and the encircling service-belt.

"I—I'm glad you've come back," said he, with a quiver in his throat. "I wanted to go Home—you know. That Le Beau cracked me on the head with his gold-bag. It's full of yellow stuff. I put the belt round it——"

That was as far as he got. He choked and turned his back on Grainger.

Forty-Mile's eyes flickered oddly as he looked down on the enshrined buckskin bag. He understood. He sympathized, while his heart was glad for "the boy."

"Friend o' mine," said he, quietly, "you've done yourself proud. And you needn't worry. You can still go home."

He laid a hand upon Blount's left shoulder.

"I overhauled Le Beau not a quarter mile from where you fired at him. He was stone-dead—shot. You didn't lose your man. And you can go home the minute after you bring him in and sign the El Dorado's receipt!"

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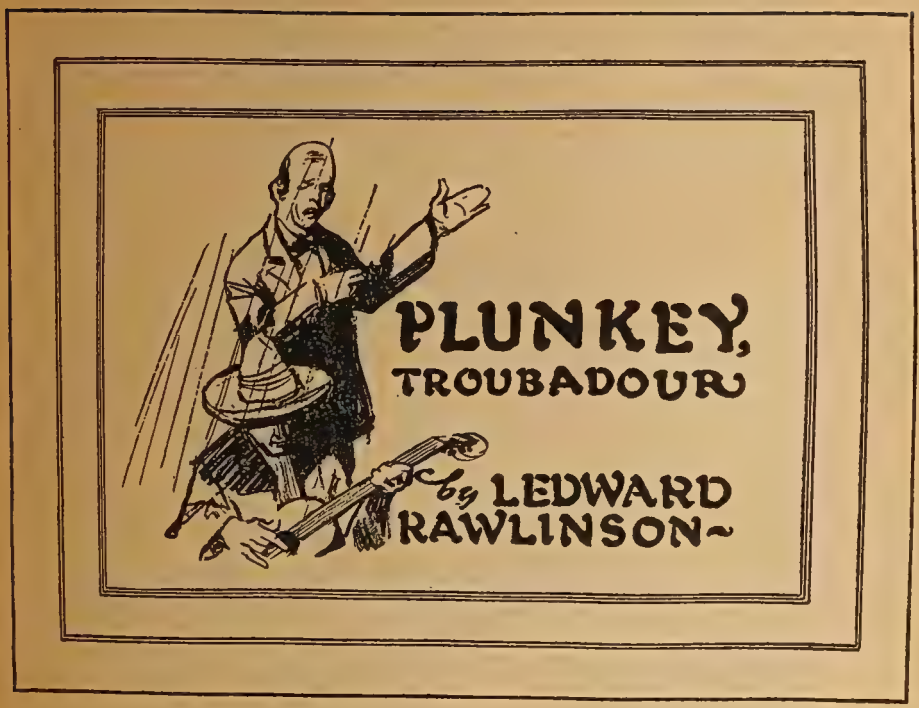

THEY had shot the President of Andesia. Flags were flying, bands were playing, bells were ringing, and the whole city of La Piña was on a spree. Ribaldry and debauch was the program for the day.

But in the midst of all this national rejoicing up on that bleak plateau far above the clouds of the continent of South America, there was one unhappy soul, one who could not join in the noisy acclaim nor worship at the Bacchic shrine. This was William Plunkey.

William was in love, and went about with a face as cheerful as a short-circuited arc-lamp on a dark night. His days were long and wretched, his nights robbed of repose. A black-eyed Madonna whom he had never met had twisted his heart-strings and left him in a very miserable, wobegone condition.

Plunkey was a little bald Englishman, thirty-eight years of age, and as guileless and gentle as a girl. Though not by nature gregarious, he was forever playing the part of a Good Samaritan. If a gringo was in jail he ministered to his needs and made his stay pleasant; if he was sick he doctored him; if he was dead he gave him a decent Christian funeral and said prayers that made strong men tremble as the body was unceremoniously pushed into the niche in the wall.

But as he never drank anything stronger than tea and refused to waste his hours in the gilded cafés, he was never popular for more than a day at a time.

Plunkey was employed as a clerk in the office of an American company that was building a railroad across the wide-stretching plateau of Andesia. He came to La Piña from South Africa, having journeyed over the busy trail that stretches across the wide Atlantic from Capetown to the famous southern seaport of Buenos Ayres. In his room there was always a roll of blankets in a corner awaiting the arrival in town of the next broken-down wanderer, for there was ever a constant stream of restless adventurers of all nationalities trekking up to the lofty Cordilleras where the glaring sun scorches by day and the cold wind freezes by night. Creed or color, breed or brogue made no difference to Plunkey. One and all, he fed them and clothed them and found them work.

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SPIKE TAYLOR, was one of these adventure-seekers who had strayed far from the blue skies and sunny seas of the lands of the palm and the tamarisk. Chased out of Ecuador for aiding and abetting a revolution, Taylor stowed away on a sailing-vessel and landed several weeks later in the bay of Mollendo, through the thunderous surf of which he swam ashore. By beating his way in an unbelievable manner across the leprous desert of Peru he finally landed in La Piña, his health gone, his clothing barely sufficient to dust a piano with.

Immediately Plunkey took the wanderer under his wing, nursed him back to health and strength, gave him clothes and found him work.

Spike was thirty-two years of age, long and lean, genial and gay, brimful of lawless activity. Inasmuch as he had sojourned many years in the "*poco tiempo*" countries south of Panama, he was wise in the ways of the native, and it was therefore natural that he should eventually drift down to the market-place in search of a wife.

There is but one royal route to the heart of a maiden in Andesia. Not by the time-worn philters of diamonds, candies and hot-house flowers may the prize be captured, but with a sewing-machine, a small, self-starting, demountable-rimmed, hand sewing-machine, with U. S. A. emblazoned across its fly-wheel in gilt letters. The possession of one of these emblems of civilization elevates a girl far above her sisters, and gives her a standing in the community equal to that acquired by an American heiress when she marries a titled gentleman from the other side.

Of course Spike knew this, and the moment he appeared in the market with a shirt-making machine under his arm there was almost a riot. The crowd of would-be brides blocked traffic for an hour. At the end of that time the wife-hunter made his selection, handed over the engine and received the parental blessing. Whereupon everybody got gloriously drunk, according to the custom of the country. The lucky girl was a bare-legged, bare-footed Chola of eighteen, with a delicate, primate-like arrangement of facial beauty, an arm like a butcher and a twenty-eight waist. No, not even when viewed through smoked glasses or at a distance of a hundred feet, did she look even passably pretty, but she had that pathetic, clinging, true-till-death look in her eyes that snares a man sooner or later. Of a truth this game called Life is most artfully contrived.

In due season the wedding-ceremony was perpetrated 'neath a festal bower of trailing vines in a llama-stable. This was not according to the custom of the country, but it was raining heavily at the time and the cathedral roof had numerous weak spots in it, the condors having torn away several of the rafters for use in building their nests.

The groom was tastefully haberdashed in an Irish tweed, with a rose as big as a boiled New England dinner in his buttonhole, and was attended by Plunkey in the capacity of best man. The bride, who was thrown away by her father, was decked in fine laces, garlanded with flowers and embalmed with sweet-smelling perfume and imported kerosene-oil.

There were many presents, but space forbids a detailed waybill. The principal ones were: Bride's father, a *bacalao* (dried codfish) suitably inscribed; bride's mother, a mahogany club suitably spiked; bride to groom, a red petticoat; groom to bride, an oil-stove, a plaster saint, and a frying-pan. Padre Mendoza, the officiating clergyman, donated a lot of black beans and red peppers, but unfortunately one of the guests tried his hands at shoplifting and, for an amateur, he was very successful.

THE honeymoon was spent on a trip to the slaughter-house, after which the happy couple started light housekeeping in the home of the bride's mother and fifteen or sixteen other members of the family, not to mention a transient population of loafers and a wonderful collection of mongrel dogs, cats and other domesticated beasts of the field.

The days went by in proper order, Sunday bobbing up regularly at the end of each week as it was ordained. Ere long Mrs. Taylor was wearing shoes and stockings, erasing the glow from her nose with powdered limestone-rock on the end of a rag and dressing as punctiliously as a fine lady. She was exceedingly proud of her alliance with the superior white race.

After a month of married bliss, Spike resigned his position as timekeeper on the new railroad and sent his *preciosa* out to work. He believed in the old, elemental, as-it-was-in-the-beginning order of things under

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which the man stayed at home and the woman went out to earn the daily beans. Beyond the venture of a doubt, those Pharisees and Philistines and Zulus and Egyptians had the right idea concerning man's majesty.

While Mrs. Spike maltreated the laundry of the nobility on the rocks down by the river, Spike sat in the sun like a potentate of old, contentedly smoking cigarettes and chatting with his father-in-law, a toothless, gargoyle-faced Aymara who spent most of his time in a state of dreamy drunkenness produced by copious draughts of a throat-excoriating juice called *pisco*. It was a glorious existence, an endless succession of undistinguished days.

Plunkey, the Good Samaritan, came quite frequently to visit the happy couple, with the result that the desire for a mate began to burn vigorously in his bosom also. He could not sleep, his appetite failed and he took long, lonely walks in the moonlight communing with the angels. He was really in bad shape.

But the rose will not bloom for ever, neither will the bee buzz nor the cat call. There is an end to all human and connubial happiness. One summer afternoon the hydra-headed, green-eyed, prehensile-jawed monster of jealousy came sneaking into the little rabbit-warren of a house in which Taylor and the multitude dwelt.

It was one of the wedding-gifts that caused all the trouble, to wit, the dried codfish. Because Spike could not withstand the indescribable odor emanating from this desiccated man-eater of the seas hanging on his bedroom-sitting-room-dining-room wall, he very gallantly presented it to a dark-eyed belle next door whose olfactory nerves were not so highly developed.

Upon hearing of this, Mrs. Taylor was wroth, very wroth, for she had intended saving the fish for the silver-wedding feast, in accordance with another custom of the country. After a fruitless attempt to extricate the orbs of the lady next door, she turned her attention to her husband. In the latter case she was abundantly successful. First she batted him playfully with the club, then she drove a knife between his fifth and sixth ribs, upward and forward, coming within a millimeter of severing his windpipe and making herself a lonely widow. It was a narrow escape.

Of course Mrs. Taylor immediately regretted the operation that she had so rashly performed. Racked by shame and remorse, she bathed and bound her husband's wounds and put him to bed. Spike was a perfect patient and never complained, not even when his sorrowing spouse completely immersed him with her tears.

As for Plunkey, he received the news of the catastrophe bravely, but it did not diminish the fever of his passion one dram, for he knew full well that the course of true love is always more or less obstructed, and that Spike's little encounter with his matrimonial adversary was merely sent to try him, to put him through the test of the refining fire and make him a better, a nobler husband.

Six weeks dragged by. At last Taylor was able to leave his bed. The moment he did so, he put his arms about his wife's waist, struck a dramatic attitude, and said:

"Genevieve, I forgive——"

No, it won't work. The happy-ever-after finale is too thin to get away with in this case. You shall know the truth, even if it does shatter a beautiful romance. What really happened is this:

Spike secured a divorce. Seizing a double-barreled shotgun, he drove his wife, her mother and father, their sons and their wives, their dogs and their cats, across the Cordilleras. Reno papers please copy.

THE day this happened was the day some one jokingly assassinated the newly elected president. The whole town was drunk with joy and liquor, not because of a lust for blood, but because the deceased had attempted to put a stop to the practise of revoluting, and revolutions formed the sole diversion of the people. There wasn't a moving-picture show in the whole Republic.

As Spike came loping down the hill with the agile step that goes with a merry heart or a pay-day, he chanced upon Plunkey walking with head bowed low and every mark of dejection and despair. For a while they chatted on subjects of general and international interest such as wireless telepathy, the price of living, Christian Science, golden sunsets, mountain lions, aeroplanes, astrology, Chinamen and steam-heat. Then in a sudden explosion of confidence Plunkey disclosed the unbelievable information that he was in love.

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Taylor was amazed beyond words. Speech failed him for a time. Eventually he recovered, and plied the unhappy swain with questions. Plunkey answered them all like a trained witness, and laid bare the secrets of his breast as he had never done before, going back through the years to the days of his youth and relating his various love affairs in chronological sequence. Spike was intent to hear. At last he spoke:

"Plunk," he said, laying an affectionate hand on the other's shoulder, "you're a friend of mine. I was a stranger, and you took me in. The best thing I could do to reciprocate would be to put strychnin in your soup or give you a hypodermic injection of nitro-glycerin. You saw what happened to me. Can't you find some other hobby besides marrying a semi-savage? Join a revolution, become a bull-fighter, a presidential candidate, a gun-smuggler or a missionary; anything but a benedict. These women are too boisterous, too playful with weapons. No man ought to marry a Chola unless he can wear a suit of armor night and day. Wait until you get back to the Old Kent Road where you can get a nice rosy-cheeked lassie with blue eyes and false teeth and a cultivated taste for bitter beer."

The Englishman shook his head sadly. His case was chronic. For a moment there was silence. The wind carried with it the sounds of jubilation from the city below.

"Then, if you must continue your mad career, listen to me," continued Spike earnestly, "and I will put you wise, as they say in the *Estados Unidos*. No girl admires a non-combatant or a non-commissioned officer on the battle-field of love. She wants a mud-stained, blood-stained warrior to come along at a six-cylinder, seventy-horsepower gait and sweep her right off her feet with declarations of devotion and presents of sewing-machines. You're too mild and unobtrusive. Turn loose the smoldering fires of your heart, become hectic, fervid and passionate, and she's yours. Your Spanish isn't exactly the pure Castellano, but it'll do."

Plunkey smiled a benevolent smile and blushed.

"I'll try it, Spike," he said gently.

"It never fails," declared Taylor, as he made a move to continue his way down the hill, "never."

NEXT morning as Spike sat *dolce far nienting* in the sun outside the old homestead, now so strangely quiet without the family and the family pets, Plunkey came to him with radiant face, the glow of his soul shining through his skin.

"I took your advice," chuckled the Englishman happily. "I talked to her last night on the balcony."

Spike rose and extended his hand.

"Hearty congratulations," said he with a grin. "Tell me all about it."

"I touched 'er on the shoulder and she didn't mind a bit," cried the Englishman in great glee.

Taylor laughed till the tears came.

"You're on the home run. The end is in sight," he said. "Now go over to Calle Comercio and buy a sewing-machine, and the girl's yours. Also stop over at the Padre's on the way down and arrange about the ceremony. It's ten pesos with music, and five without, but if you ever heard the Andesian equivalent of 'The Voice that Breathed o'er Eden' played on a bamboo flute, you'd prefer the without."

With this injunction the love-sick one departed, chuckling happily to himself.

A couple of days went by. There being no sign of Plunkey, Spike concluded that he was away on a honeymoon, but on the third day the Englishman appeared, his face a perfect picture of distress.

"It's all over," he moaned in anguish, dropping into a chair. "I bought the finest sewing-machine in La Piña and gave it to the girl, but it was wasted money."

Taylor looked troubled. Never before had the oracle refused to work. There was something wrong.

"She didn't refuse to accept the machine, did she?"

"Oh, no," said Plunkey, "that's where the rub comes in. She took it, then told me she was married. She 'ad a wedding-ring on all the time, but I was so excited I never noticed it. 'Er 'usband is a rubber-man down the Beni. 'E'll be 'ere next week on a visit. I 'ad to go back to the Padre and tell 'im the wedding was postponed."

Spike objurgated soothingly.

"The cat!" he exploded. "You must get out of that house right away, Plunkey. If hubby finds out you gave the sewing-machine to his wife he's liable to get jealous and hara-kiri you any hour of the day or night.

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Surgery comes natural to these hot-blooded caballeros."

Plunkey shivered; his face turned very pale.

"I wish I'd never seen a girl," he muttered desperately. "I was 'appy——"

Spike lifted a gentle protesting hand.

"Plunk," he said, "till Gabriel blows that fortissimo blast on his horn, and puts the kibosh on this planet for all time, there's going to be women in the world, and wherever there's women there's wo. The two are as inseparable as corned-beef and cabbage. You couldn't get 'em apart with a meat-ax. But don't give way to melancholia. Get another room and look around for another pretty girl. There's more fish in the sea than ever was made into fishcakes."

Silently the Englishman rose and walked slowly out of the room to the street. He was very miserable.

The following day he secured lodging in the most aristocratic section of the town, where the natives always wear shoes and bathe themselves regularly every six months. Society in La Piña is divided into two classes—the proletarians and the amphibians. The working-class never bathes and the bathing-class never works. This is true reciprocity. It beats Socialism all to pieces.

Plunkey's new room was in a fine old megalithic mansion with gaudily painted pictures of tropical jungles on the patio walls and all modern conveniences inside—empty kerosene-cans for wash-basins, Circassian-walnut bureaus made out of old packing-cases, and sanitary mattresses stuffed with shavings and cinders. Every room in the house had a cobble-stoned floor and faced the ocean. Of course the ocean was five hundred miles away as the crow flies but there were lots of mountains and deserts in between to look at on fine days.

For a week nothing happened, and Time the great healer was sealing up the cracks and crevices in Plunkey's heart. He began to eat well, sleep well, and take an interest in current topics and smallpox.

On Sunday morning, as he issued forth for matins at the missionary's, it chanced that a beautiful señorita, decked in black silks and satins for mass, came out of her room on the opposite side of the balcony. She was the loveliest creature he had ever seen.

Her haughty face was a delicate peat-color, her amorous eyes black and shiny as a pair of patent-leather shoes. Lips—you never saw such lips. Pink in the shade and scarlet in the sun, they fitted her mouth perfectly and sheltered her snow-white teeth from the cold night-winds. Her figure was on the telegraph-pole order—tall, willowy and graceful.

Of course this knocked Plunkey off his perch again, and when the roll was called at the missionary's he was missing. He went around the town in a circle, his head awhirl, his heart aflame. Delight fairly bubbled out of him. Hope shone on his path once more. Of a sudden he remembered Taylor, and decided to go to him for advice. Like a man fleeing from a visionary snake, he tore up the hill.

When he reached the little house, Spike sat in the back yard plucking the feathers from some kind of a winged biped that he had kidnaped from a neighbor's pen while said neighbor was at church endeavoring to square himself against everlasting damnation and other advertised atrocities.

"Hello, Plunk," said Spike, wrenching out a quill. "I thought this was a squab, but I find it's a dwarf ostrich. How's everything in the *affaire de coeur* department?"

In an excited voice Plunkey told of his new love.

"Didn't I tell you that you'd find another?" inquired Spike, pointing an accusing feather at the Englishman. "I knew you would. This time, however, you must act differently, for she's one of the four hundred, the élite, the amphibious. You must deck out your person to the best advantage, get a guitar and try your hand at the wonderful out-door sport known as serenading. You can't give a sewing-machine to a lady—you only do that with the Cholas, the bourgeoisie. Sing some of the old Spanish love-songs that Louis IV used to warble to Helen of Troy on the docks at Madrid years ago, songs that start off with a swell of violent passion and fade into groans of hopeless longings."

Plunkey smiled weakly.

"No, I mean that," continued Spike earnestly. "The beautiful old troubadour, Rómeo and Juliet, won't-you-come-out-to-night-to-night style of courtship is still fashionable down in these old-world, red-roofed, Latin-American countries. Can you play a guitar?"

For answer Plunkey shook his head.

"No matter," Spike went on. "You can easily get a man to play for you, but you

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must sing personally—you can't do that by proxy. The rules of the game forbid it. There's a beautiful song called 'La Golandrina'. It's about a nightingale or a parrot or some other feathered songster that fell out of the nest and broke its yoke before it was properly hatched. It's full of pathos and sorrow and sadness. There's a tear to every line, and a waste-paper-basketful in the chorus. The girls fall for that kind of stuff every time. You can get the song at the bookstore, but don't bother to learn every one of the forty-six verses—just the first verse and the chorus will do.

"Sing as you never sang before, until she comes out on the balcony. If she throws a rose you're in solid. You can call again and bring the music. But if it's anything more substantial than a rose—say a water-pitcher or an empty bottle—that's a metaphorical way of letting you know that you've drawn a blank. It's the most practical, time-saving system of she-loves-me, she-loves-me-not ever invented."

Plunkey grinned.

"I might try it as a last resort," he said, "but serenading isn't much in my line."

For an hour they chatted, then Plunkey withdrew, declining Spike's invitation to remain until luncheon was ready. All through the endless afternoon the Englishman wandered about his new abode in the hope of catching a glimpse of the señorita, but in this he was unsuccessful. He was restless, terribly restless. When dinner-time came he could barely touch his food.

At eight o'clock the military band, preceded by eight little drummer-boys, came trooping down the street and with it half the population of the capital city. The band-concert on Sunday evening is the social event of the week in La Piña. Everybody of note comes to promenade round the Plaza. It is a wonderful scene and has all of the gaiety of Easter Sunday on Fifth Avenue, with none of the bloodshed.

His face distorted by a miserable, heart-hungry look, Plunkey joined the excited mob of natives. Of a sudden he spied the señorita walking with an old white-haired dueña, a bare-footed Indian girl trudging behind. His heart almost leaped from his body, his pulses rattled noisily.

For half an hour he followed at a safe distance, eying the shapely lines of the fair one's back, then he overtook her and wheeled sharply that he might meet her face to face. But the girl stared at him with eyes as cold and unfriendly as a bull's.

Again and again Plunkey passed her by, on one occassion going so far as to raise his hat; all to no purpose. She dealt him nothing but frozen, disdainful glances. Fervently the Englishman prayed that she might faint or have a slight attack of some harmless kind of paralysis or locomotor ataxia, that he might rescue her, but nobody in heaven or anywhere else paid any attention to his prayers.

If only an Indian would run amuck, or a mad dog, or an earthquake, or a volcano—even a red-hot meteor from the skies would have been acceptable. But there was nothing doing in the holocaust and cataclysm line. Everything was disgustingly serene, all nature at rest. It was the Sabbath day.

After an hour of agonizing music the band bellowed forth the national anthem, and the crowd dispersed. Sick and weary, Plunkey trudged through the darkness to the river's brink. For a time he stood listening to the angry roar of the mad waters, then he plucked off his coat preparatory to jumping over the nine-foot precipice to death and destruction. Yet again he hesitated, lost in retrospection. Finally he said good-by to the surrounding landscape and prepared to leap. Just at that moment he remembered something—the office.

It would be wrong to leave without giving the usual week's notice. His sense of duty was very strong. Muttering tender maledictions, the poor fellow drew on his coat and crept sullenly to his little room, there to toss and turn on his hard, hard bed. All sorts of bold schemes hatched themselves in his fevered mind. One of these was not only bold but brilliant.

That was to set fire to the house and at the risk of his life dash through the conflagration to save the girl. There would be no danger of the firemen robbing him of this opportunity to achieve distinction, for they had never been known to arrive at the scene of the disaster within twenty-four hours. Unfortunately, just as he was working out the details, he fell into the clutches of Morpheus.

NEXT morning Plunkey rose and went to work, but his mind was far away from the debits and credits and trial-balances. He was worried and ill

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at ease and squirmed and wriggled uncomfortably on his seat. It was a long day, but at last five o'clock came.

As the setting sun was turning the white glitter of snow and ice on the mountains into gorgeous hues of raspberry and strawberry, Plunkey traced his way through the winding streets to the home of Señor Taylor. Spike was slicing up an ox-tongue with an old machete when the Englishman entered.

"Hello, Plunkey," he said, looking up. "Sit down. You're just in time for dinner."

The Englishman shook his head sorrowfully.

"I'm in no condition to eat, Spike, but I thought I'd pay you a visit anyway."

"Sure, Mike, you're welcome."

So saying, Taylor drew up a chair and sat down. For a moment there was silence.

"I met an old lady-friend of mine today," said Spike at length, with a roguish smile, "and she lives in your house."

Plunkey's eyes brightened.

"What's she like?" he demanded eagerly.

"Tall, slim and slender. She's the girl you're in love with. I knew her in Lima years ago. I told her all about you; that you're a good friend of mine."

The Englishman came to his feet with a startled cry and a ruddy blush.

"Is that the truth?"

Spike nodded his head, and began to eat.

Plunkey danced with glee, his face was aglow with color.

"What did she say?" he inquired briskly.

"She said she'd be glad to have you serenade her," replied Taylor. "She is tired of hearing the love-sick youth of La Piña.

"Honest?"

"*Sí señor.*"

Plunkey grabbed at his hat.

"Then she shall 'ave a serenade," he declared emphatically as he opened the door, "and this very night. I won't make any attempt to sing Spanish, but I'll do my level best in English."

AFTER considerable difficulty, the amatory Englishman engaged a mahogany-complexioned *hombre* to accompany him on the guitar, the arrangement being that the musician would render some dreamy Spanish love-song, to which Plunkey would supply the words. Promptly at 8 P.M. the orchestra arrived, and at 8:01 it began to rain. An hour passed while they waited beneath a balcony; an hour of untold anguish for Plunkey.

At 9:30 he could hold himself no longer, and the musician, who was a dobie bricklayer by profession and a stanch member of the union, was demanding double pay for working in wet weather. At first Plunkey balked, but in the end he consented and paid the money in advance.

In a drenching downpour the two stood in the center of the courtyard, and underneath the fair one's window began the serenade. To the tune of "*Tú no sabes*" Plunkey sang "Juanita, Juanita, Lean Thou Dear Upon My Heart," illustrating the words with fantastic but appropriate gestures.

His voice was a burro-profundo, and the expression that he jerked into the old, old song that sister used to play on the piano whenever Aunt Polly and Uncle Sam came to the farm was wonderful. Every note just reeked with pathos.

Harder and harder it rained. As Plunkey couldn't sing without throwing back his head and placing his face almost parallel with the heavens, his mouth became full of water at each note, but like a man fighting for life he gulped it down and filled the wild night air with his agonizing supplication.

Fifteen long minutes went by, but no rose came out of the darkness, no water-pitcher, no empty bottle. The serenadee was reserving her decision. Dripping like a deep-sea diver just emerging from a swim on the bottom of the ocean, Plunkey doubled, trebled and tripled his efforts. At last the window opened. For a second the hesitation and suspense were awful. Then an angry male voice shouted:

"*Váyase al diablo.*" (This is Spanish, but it isn't nice Spanish—"Go to the devil!" in fact.)

In that moment the castles Plunkey had builded in the air toppled over. His head dropped on his bosom with a crash.

The musician ceased thrumming and looked up at the window from whence came those bitter words.

"*No está la señorita?*" he inquired. ("Is the señorita not at home?")

"She left for the country this afternoon," vociferated the voice in rancid tones. "She won't be back for a week." Then the window closed with a bang.

Despite the discomforts of his saturated condition, the music-maker chuckled loudly,

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for he had a keen sense of humor; but Plunkey, looking like an orphan too late for a picnic, turned and staggered up the stairway to his room. All hope and happiness was dead.

Next morning when the Englishman woke his body ached all over. There was an excruciating pain in his chest. He attempted to rise, but could not. At nine o'clock the Indian girl came to make up his bed. He was then delirious. A message was sent immediately to the office where he worked, and two of his fellow-clerks appeared a little later with the best native doctor in the city, a little sawed-off body-snatcher with a face like a bear.

After his examination, the *médico* advised in solemn tones that the sick man be sent to the hospital forthwith, and this was done. A gang of Indians carried both bed and patient through the streets. There are no ambulances in Andesia.

IT was not until eight days later that Taylor heard of the illness of his friend and, although the time was nigh to midnight, he raced to the hospital. There a white-robed sister led him breathless and hatless into the little dimly lighted room.

"Hello Spike," said the sick man weakly, "I'm glad you came. I serenaded the señorita the day you saw her, but found out that she had left for the country."

"I guess she's back now, Plunkey," answered Taylor with emotion. "You better hurry up and get well. She's just crazy about you, she says, and wants to meet you."

Plunkey raised his head a little.

"I'd like to see 'er now," he said, with eyes that were eloquent in appeal.

For a while Spike meditated, then he tiptoed across the room.

"I'll be back in a minute," he whispered as he opened the door.

Half an hour later Taylor returned with the señorita, her head and shoulders enveloped in a black silk mantilla. For a second the girl hesitated, then she crept quietly to the bedside.

Plunkey's eyes glistened and a smile trembled on his lips. By a supreme effort he sat up.

"Gringo, my gringo," sobbed the girl, taking the wasted hand tenderly in her own and dropping to her knees. "My gringo!"

Plunkey's lips moved, but he could not speak, for the end was very near. Presently the sister came forward and laid a crucifix upon the bed. A long moment passed. The room was very still. With a seraphic smile on his ashen face the Englishman dropped back. It was all over.

Silently Spike led the girl out. Without ever a word they walked together through the narrow streets until they reached her home. At the door of the old house Taylor took off his hat.

"Señorita," he said unsteadily, "as a total stranger I must apologize for disturbing you at this late hour of the night and causing you to come with me to the hospital, but ——"

"It is nothing señor," answered the girl.

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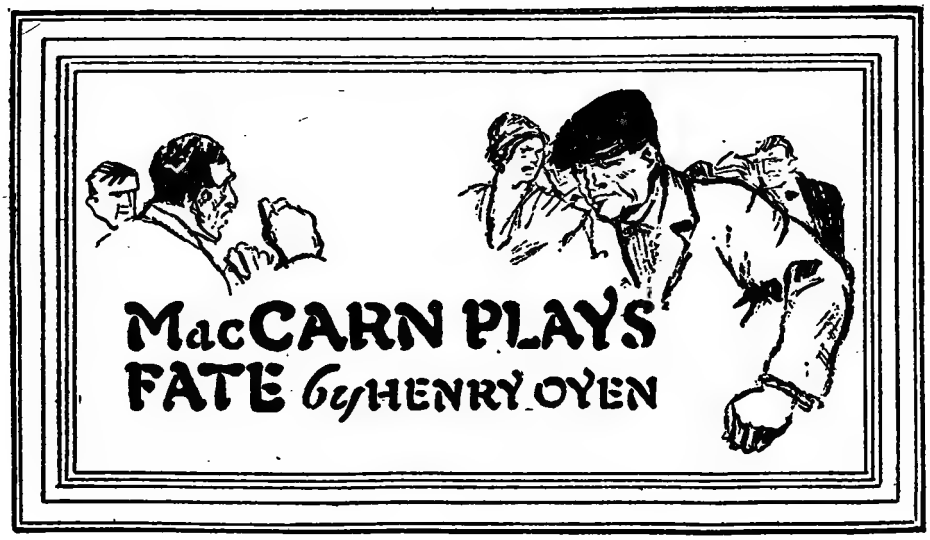

MacCARN PLAYS FATE

by HENRY OYEN

PLAIN-CLOTHES-MAN MacCARN stood in the office of the new Inspector of the Second Division humming unmusically through his nose. He had spent twenty years of his life in the district. The Inspector had been there less than twenty days. MacCarn could shake hands with most of the district's population, from pickpockets to priests. The Inspector was renowned for his pull with the big politicians. MacCarn at that moment possessed two suits of the old-fashioned black clothes which he always wore—which with the low, stand-up collar, made him look like a priest—and had $800 in the Hibernian Savings Bank. The Inspector was verging on millionairedom from his pickings in the various vice districts.

Humming through his nose was a permanent habit with MacCarn. These are some of the reasons why he did not stop humming as he entered the tobacco-smudged room.

"MacCarn," said the Inspector, leaning back till the swivel-chair creaked under his gross body, "you're a pretty wise bird, eh?"

MacCarn suddenly stopped humming.

"You could run this division a whole lot better than I can, couldn't you?" continued the Inspector. "You know it, too, don't you?"

MacCarn did not answer.

"But you ain't doing it, see?" said the Inspector, sitting up. "You're just walking a beat without the harness on—see? I'm running this division. Understand? I am—not you. And you're too busy and important around here for your own good."

"What is it, Inspector?" asked MacCarn quietly.

The Inspector bit off the end of a cigar.

"Altogether too busy and important for your own good," he continued. He looked over the match he had just struck and raised his eyebrows. "Do you get that? For your own good!" He lighted the cigar leisurely, threw the match on the floor and struck the desk with his flabby fist.

"Young Leary, that's what it is!" he growled. "Who the —— told you to go picking him up? Huh? Do you know who he is? Huh?"

MacCarn looked silently at his superior for the space of three or four breaths. It was the first time in years that any commander had seen fit to interfere with his system of fighting crime and disorder in the Bad Lands. No commander ever had liked him. His independence and his obvious superiority in the district's police work had precluded that. But no commander before this one had failed to realize that MacCarn, with his uncanny knowledge of the dark, mole-like workings of the Bad Lands, his absolute honesty and devotion to duty, was the most valuable asset attached to the Second Division.

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No one until now had questioned his judgment of what to do and when to do it in the everlasting battle to keep the district from becoming more of an eyesore than it was. MacCarn, as he studied the Inspector, sensed the nearness of something bigger, something more cruel than a mere "call on the carpet."

"Sure, I know who he is," he said. "He's the toughest, meanest, wickedest little crook in the district. He's the leader of the Trilby gang over by the tracks, and he's got them nerved up to where they think they're running the officers over here. Officer Reagan got one of them—Bull Klein—put away for thirty days, for having stolen lead pipe in his possession, and they've promised to get Reagan as soon as Klein gets out of stir. He's due back Saturday. Squint Leary was bragging last night what they were going to do to Reagan when Klein is back, so I picked him up and threw him in the wagon to get their goat. It's the only way to break their nerve, Inspector. They won't do anything without Leary leading them. I didn't want him around when Klein comes out.

"He's Mike Grogan's nephew, that's who he is, you big boob!" sneered the Inspector, as if he had not heard a word. "And I'm running this division now. Do you get me? *I'm* running this division."

He shook his head and rolled his cigar around angrily.

"Lay off of 'em!" he growled menacingly. "Get me. Lay off the Trilby gang and Squint Leary. I'm running the division. Don't be so —— important."

MacCarn's gray eyes widened just a trifle. What lay behind this interference by the Inspector was becoming clear.

"Do you mean leave them alone altogether, Inspector?" he asked.

"That's what I said; keep your hands off."

"And Reagan—" MacCarn's lips tightened a little at the corners, "are you going to leave young Reagan on that beat along the tracks, Inspector?"

"Huh?"

"They'll be getting Reagan, sure, Inspector," said MacCarn. "They've been bragging that no officer must touch them. Letting Squint Leary go like this will nerve 'em up to anything. They'll put it over on Reagan some night after Klein gets back. He's nothing but a fool of a boy, Reagan, though he's married and got a kid, Inspector. But he can't live on that beat after he's touched the Trilbys—now."

The Inspector again leaned back contemptuously.

"Say! Who the —— do you think you are, anyhow?" he said slowly. "Do you want to tell me how to do everything in this division? Or do you want to go back in the harness? Huh?" He stared the unimportant-looking MacCarn up and down sneeringly. "Reagan's a pet of yours, ain't he? Married a niece of yours, I hear. Well, let me tell you something: Reagan stays where he is." His fat underjaw shot out hideously. "*He* got too important for his own good, too."

MacCarn stood looking at his commander with a slight parting of the lips. He had a way of dropping his thin face, with the thin straight nose, down between his enormously broad shoulders, and when he did this his deep-set eyes looked out through the heavy, overhanging brows. The Inspector, looking up sideways, was slightly disconcerted. He had always thought of MacCarn as a small man. Now he saw that he was only broad out of all proportion to his height.

"You keep your hands off 'em," repeated the Inspector, "for your own good."

MacCARN went out without a word. He felt the veins in his neck begin to swell, and he would not let the Inspector see him display any feeling. In the squadroom he ran full tilt into Swanson, the old desk-sergeant, coming on night duty.

"Ole," said MacCarn quizzically, "why don't you go over to Mike Grogan's saloon and lick Mike's boots for him?"

"What for?" demanded Swanson.

"Well," said MacCarn, passing on, "then you might be an Inspector, and then you needn't care whether you were a man or—something else."

Out on the grimy iron stairs of the station-house MacCarn placed his right foot upon the iron railing and apparently proceeded to devote himself to a careful study of his right shoe. He felt a little sick, a little chilled. It was the nearest to feeling shocked that he had been in years. He knew, better than any one, that the town then was in the hands of a gang that had organized the vice and crime industry as it

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seldom had been organized before. It was a year with the lid off, a year when hell screamed. Mike Grogan was the gang's master in the Bad Lands, and Mike retailed the criminal privileges as licenses were sold in the city hall. To make the privileges good he had to have his own man for Inspector. He had him. It was Mike Grogan who ran the Second Division headquarters.

MacCarn knew this, and it was nothing extraordinary to him. But what he had met in the Inspector's office—that was new. Never in his long, ugly experience had he seen a commander deliberately make an offering of an officer to appease the furies of a protected gang!

And it had to be Tom Reagan, too, big, fearless, boyish Tom Reagan, husband to MacCarn's niece, with a family just started in a little easy-payment cottage in the suburbs, and the joy of living shining in his blue Irish eyes. MacCarn had stood godfather to the first child. Another was destined to arrive soon.

And off there in the dark by the railroad-yards Tom Reagan was walking his beat, twirling his club and whistling light-heartedly, while from behind box cars, foul saloon doors and other lurking places the Trilbys watched him, grinning their sly, wolfish grins, viciously confident under the protection they had bought, one way or another, from Mike Grogan, and lusting in contemplation of what would happen when Bull Klein came out of stir and Squint Leary led them on. Reagan had got too busy for his own good, too. So the Trilbys were to be allowed to pay him off in their own peculiar way. The Inspector said so. Mike Grogan said so. And MacCarn—keep your hands off them, for your own good!

"——!" murmured MacCarn, raising his head.

He thought of the Inspector, flabby and prosperous, of Mike Grogan, powerful in the Party; of Reagan and Nell and the baby; and the low collar grew tight around his neck. He looked up at the red-brick station-house behind him. Dirty and foul, reeking with the ugly atmosphere of an old police station as it was, MacCarn had come to regard the place as home. To loaf around its gloomy rooms in the slack hours was recreation to him. But now he moved away, as if the sight of it filled him with loathing. He began walking slowly up the dark street toward the Bad Lands. He held his head down. He did not hum. Occasionally he tugged at the white tufts of hair in his ears. And by these signs any one who knew MacCarn would have known that he was troubled.

Two blocks up the street, in the heart of the Bad Lands, MacCarn paused before the ill-lighted window of a tiny tobacco-shop. A printed card hung in the window. It announced that on Saturday night the Trilby Social and Athletic Club would give a ball and entertainment at Oberpeck's Hall. The card seemed to hold unwarranted interest for MacCarn. He stood there studying it and pulling at his ears.

Saturday night. Bull Klein got out Saturday morning. Oberpeck's Hall was over at Green and the tracks, on Tom Reagan's beat. Let's see. To-day was Monday. Hm.

HE STOOD there for some time, apparently studying the various brands of cigars and tobacco displayed in the window, until no one save the little hunchback Jew proprietor was in the shop. The hunchback did a little business in cocaine through a rear entrance to his back room. In return he was MacCarn's tried and trusted "stool-pigeon," one of the half-dozen varied characters who let the veteran detective know the faintest whispers that went through the dark channels of the underworld.

MacCarn entered and called loudly for a plug of tobacco.

The hunchback glanced cautiously out of the window as he turned to fill the order.

"You noticed the card, didn't you, Mac?" he muttered as he cut the tobacco.

MacCarn nodded.

"Tell Reagan to keep away from Oberpeck's Saturday," said the storekeeper.

"I thought so," said MacCarn, digging for a coin. "What have they got framed up, Max?"

Max slipped the plug into an oiled-paper bag and as he handed it over the counter said, "Fake rough-house. They start a row when Reagan's passing. He butts in, and they get him. Bad stuff."

MacCarn pocketed his purchase.

"All right, Max," he said.

As he came out of the store a thin-faced, weedy young fellow with close-set eyes passed by. He turned and grinned at MacCarn in open contempt. It was Squint Leary.

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MacCarn made no sign that he had seen. He continued on his stroll, outwardly placid, only indicating by the occasional tug at his ears that he was disturbed.

"Tell Reagan to keep away from Oberpeck's on Saturday night?" No, he thought with a touch of fierce pride, that would do no good, not with big Tom Reagan. That would be like waving red at a bull. Things were not done that way in the Bad Lands —not by MacCarn. And he was the man who must do it, of course, or Nell would be paying for Tom's masses before that second kid was born.

He faced the issue squarely, with a little joy in his old fighting heart. On one side, Mike Grogan, the Inspector, Squint Leary and the Trilbys. Against them, MacCarn, alone. And Tom Reagan's life for a stake. A big game, overwhelming odds. But had Grogan and the Inspector and Squint Leary known what was going on in MacCarn's mind then they might have paused and pondered. For in the maze of the Bad Lands lay hidden many strange things that were an open book to MacCarn. He used them but seldom; never had he used them ruthlessly. But he kept his fingers constantly on the hidden wires. And now, with the Inspector's orders—"hands off"—clear in his memory, he was not thinking of right or wrong, not considering his mission in the district. His back was against the wall. He was only trying to think of the wire to pull to cheat the Trilbys of their prey.

In front of Oberpeck's Hall, a dance-hall over a saloon that fronted on the railroad-yards, he waited for Reagan.

"Well, Tom, boy," he said, "the Trilbys are giving a dance up here Saturday night."

"They'd better be decent about it, then," quoth Reagan promptly. "They'll do no hell-raising on this beat so long as I'm walking it."

"You know they're out to get you, don't you, boy?"

"Get nothing!" spat Reagan contemptuously. "They haven't got nerve enough to get anything that looks like a man. Rolling drunk coal-teamsters is their best. If they start any rough stuff Saturday night I'll fan 'em with me shillalah till they'll wish they never was born."

"Yes," said MacCarn, looking him over, "yes, you're just that kind of a —— fool, Tom. But you are what you are. Better that—do your duty as long as you're wearing the badge—than the other thing, no matter what some may say."

He went away, back into the heart of the Bad Lands, still strolling slowly, still pulling occasionally at the hair in his ears. Presently he stopped short and held up his head.

He had thought of something. It was a tough thing to do. He had never done anything like it. It was pretty rough. But the devil can be licked only with hotter fire than his own. And Nell and the kids needed Tom.

When he went on now MacCarn walked briskly. He hummed unmusically through his nose. He had found the wire.

II

MacCARN now left the Bad Lands. He went south into the tenement district where smelly, disorderly shops took the place of saloons and dance-halls, and poor working-people occupied the upper floors. Before a double, four-story tenement with a single hall he stopped and stood for a moment in thought. Then he went briskly up to a tiny two-room flat at the rear of the third-floor hall and knocked sharply on the door. There was no answer. He knocked again and, stooping down, spoke through the key-hole:

"Come on; open up, Sadie; it's MacCarn."

After a while there was the sound of somebody shuffling around inside, the lighting of a gas-jet, and a disheveled girl of twenty, chalk-white and trembling with fright, opened the door.

MacCarn pushed in and closed the door behind him.

"Sit down, Sadie," he said. "I want to talk with you. Go on. Sit down and make yourself to home."

He seated himself, and, fascinated with terror, she followed his example. Her fingers played with the front of the wrapper she had slipped on and she was panting for breath.

"What is it, Mac?" she gasped. "What's happened? You—you don't want me, Mac?"

MacCarn laughed in great good humor.

"What would I be wanting you for, Sadie?" he said. "There ain't anything on you now, is there? Only thing I know I *could* want you for is that sucker dying of

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knock-out drops when you was sitting with him in the Tivoli, but, pshaw! you'n' me're such good friends you know I wouldn't say anything about that, don't you, Sadie?"

The power of speech or motion left the girl as he talked. She sat and panted and stared, half dead with fear.

"Sure," said MacCarn, heartily, "you know that, and that's why you're going to do me a favor now, and not say a word about it. Ain't you, Sadie?"

After a while—after a struggle with a choking throat—the words came in a whisper through her dry lips.

"What is it, Mac?"

"Ain't you?" he insisted.

"Yes, Mac," she whispered. She nodded eagerly, gulping convulsively, her eyes still held helpless by his.

"Well, Sadie, it isn't much." MacCarn crossed his legs easily. "But it looks kind of funny. You know you can trust me, though, don't you? So you needn't stop to ask questions. I want you to lock up the place here and beat it, fade away, disappear, for about a week. Understand?"

She nodded, but her lips moved piteously.

"Oh, ——, Mac!" she pleaded. "Bull'll go wild. You know he's crazy jealous now. You know what Bull is, Mac!"

MacCarn looked at her steadily, his head held on one side.

"Sadie, who's been keeping it dark about that sucker in the Tivoli? Who's been taking care to see you don't get hurt? Eh, Sadie?"

"You have, Mac. I know it. You been good to me."

"Well, then, d'you think I'm going to steer you up against any trouble now?"

"But, Mac——"

His gentler manner left him like a flash and she shrank from what was in his eyes.

"All right, Mac," she cried. "I'll do it. I won't say a word. Don't—don't go back on me, Mac, please don't!"

MacCarn looked at her in a way that went well with the priest-like clothes.

"Sadie," he said, seriously, "I ain't doing this only for your good. I'm doing it because I got to do it for somebody else—just got to. But I tell you, my girl, it's going to be the best thing I ever did for you. It's going to give you a chance to be free—if you want to be. Now get your duds on and beat it out of here, right away."

"Yes, Mac."

III

BULL KLEIN came out on Saturday morning. At ten o'clock the Superintendent of the Bridewell gave him a nickel for carfare and put him outside the limestone walls, a free man. At eleven, Klein, stunted of body and fang-like of mouth, stood in the tiny flat at the end of the third-floor hall and stared around blankly at the empty rooms. It took him some time to grasp the meaning of it. He saw a half-loaf of bread on the table and felt of it. The bread was a week old and as dry and stiff as wood. Klein hurled it furiously to the floor and came down-stairs with new lines in his stupid, vicious face. MacCarn was lounging carelessly at the entrance.

"Why, hello, Bull!" he said, as if surprised.

"Hello, Mac!" said Klein.

MacCarn looked at him carefully, then he put his hand over his mouth and began to smile.

"Just get back, Bull?"

"Just got back."

"Hm." MacCarn's smile grew broader. "Heard any news?"

"Ain't seen a soul."

"Been up-stairs yet?"

"Sure," said Klein.

MacCarn tried hard to control the grin that was spreading over his face, and suddenly he gave way to uproarious laughter.

"Well, they certainly played you for a fish, didn't they, Bull?" he said lightly.

Klein stared at him. Ideas did not come swiftly to Klein.

"I guess women are about all the same, ain't they, Bull?" continued MacCarn. "Still, you can't hardly blame Sadie. She's built that way, and then she always did have kind of a leaning for Squint, didn't she? But Squint—it was hardly right of Squint to get you put away the way he did. That wasn't square stuff."

"What're yuh talkin' about, Mac?" blurted Klein fiercely.

MacCarn stopped laughing and looked at him in surprise.

"Oh, that's so," he said. "You haven't been around any yet, have you? I forgot. Well, in that case, I didn't mean to say anything, Bull. I ain't said a word."

"You 'n' me never had any trouble, Mac," said Klein. "What d' yuh mean?"

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MacCarn grew serious.

"Bull," he said, "didn't you kind of wonder how Reagan come to know you had that lead pipe?"

Klein did not answer.

"Who knew about it besides yourself?" persisted MacCarn. "Only the rest of the bunch. Well—they been giving you the laugh, the whole gang of 'em, ever since."

MacCarn shook his head slowly. "I didn't think Squint would do it to you, Bull, but I guess a man will do anything when he wants a woman, eh? Hard luck, Bull."

"What d'yuh mean, Mac?"

"Ask somebody else, Bull. I ain't saying a word. It's none of my business."

"I never made no trouble for you, Mac," pleaded Klein. "Go on, Mac; put me next."

"Oh," said MacCarn, as if irritated, "go ask anybody. Ask Max. And, say, Bull, I hear Squint is going to bawl you out at the dance at Oberpeck's to-night. He's showing you up, right."

Klein pulled his hat down over his eyes and went straight down to the tobacco-store.

"Seen anything of Sadie, Max?" he demanded.

The little hunchback looked away and hung his head.

"Come on," snarled Klein. "Has she been running around with Squint?"

The hunchback nodded. MacCarn had coached him well. "'Bout a week," he said.

Klein stared like a man in a dream. "Gimme a package o' Bull," he said, rousing himself.

He began to drink, and he drank steadily, alone and in silence, most of the afternoon. His eyes stuck out like two shiny marbles, but otherwise the liquor had no apparent effect. Toward evening he smiled slyly to himself and started for home. Near the tenement he met MacCarn.

"Mac, what'd yuh say 'bout Squint Leary showin' me up at the dance to-night?" he asked.

"Oh, he knows you won't dare to come around," laughed MacCarn.

"All right," said Klein, leering hideously. "Aw—ll *right!*"

IV

IT WAS near midnight that night when one of the Trilby gang who had been looking out of a window of Oberpeck's Hall espied Officer Reagan across the street and, turning, whistled shrilly. Instantly somebody broke a chair with a crash against the wall, and at the same time a beer-bottle went flying through a window. A roar of wild shouts followed. The gang surged in a knot to one corner of the room, struggling, stamping, cursing. The women fled. The hall immediately was like Bedlam turned loose.

It was an excellent stage-effect. The real thing hardly could have exceeded it in noise and fury. But in the midst of it Bull Klein came stalking in through the door and made his way deliberately across the floor toward the choice crew around Squint Leary. They looked at him and jumped back. Bull had a big revolver in each hand.

Across the street Tom Reagan answered the call of the row like a buck to a rival's challenge. He drew his club and sprang eagerly forward. The next instant he found himself lying face down in the cinders, with his arms spread-eagled in two grips of steel.

"Steady, boy, steady!" hissed MacCarn, holding him down.

"What the ——!" roared Reagan, struggling.

"Steady, Tom, steady. Just a minute. Ah!"

Up in the hall the crack of a shot punctuated the scuffling and brought it to a stop. For an instant the hall was still. Then another shot. Then a wild, many-tongued roar. Then a fusillade of shots, a medley of cries, groans, curses and stamping feet turned the hall into a tiny hell. It was brief, much like an explosion. Then in the stillness that followed came the sound of many feet hurrying away into the dark.

AN HOUR later Mike Grogan was talking over the telephone with the Inspector of the Second Division.

"Gimme the straight dope on the doings over at Oberpeck's," he commanded.

"They got to shooting each other," said the Inspector. "All drunk, I guess. Leary and Klein and Hickey are in the morgue and three others in St. Luke's. The Trilbys have put themselves out of business."

At that moment, off in the darkness of the Bad Lands, Plain-Clothes-Man MacCarn was steadily patrolling his beat. And he was humming, unmusically and through his nose.

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THE ADVENTURER KING

CZAR NICHOLAS OF MONTENEGRO

by ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

HE HAS always seemed to me the prince of all adventurers: a man whose nostrils sniffed the breath of battle as eagerly as most of us sniff a flower; a man whose virile person delighted in the zest of danger, who was invariably willing to stake his all on the right; a man hardy, determined, daring, resourceful, bold, yet never reckless; withal a man who knew when to let well e ough alone and steer the middle path of caution.

He happened to be born with royal blood in his veins; but that is of small account. Every inch of territory, every subject he owns, he has fought for, and it is to his credit that the domains handed to him by his predecessor, fifty-two years ago, have been rather more than doubled in extent and population through the might of his sword and the agility of his brain.

Nicholas Petrovich Niegoch, Czar of Montenegro, Prince of the Zeta, Voivode of Brda, and Gospodar of Tchernagora, Europe's last feudal ruler, was born at Niegoch, the ancestral home of his house, on September 25, 1841. He came of the wonderful line which has given rulers to Montenegro for more than two hundred years and which was one of the foremost families of the ancient principality for centuries before that. The Petrovich dynasty has reigned in Montenegro since 1696, when the rule of the hereditary vladikas, or prince-bishops, was inaugurated. But for hundreds of years before that date, even before the time of the first Black Prince, Stephen Chrnoievich, the Petrovich were an honored family, who boasted the rank of voivode or lord.

THE MIGHTY WARRIOR-MONKS

ALL of the men of this line have been men of great personal prowess, exceptional military ability, statesmanship and political cunning, and possessed of marked personal magnetism. Living, for the most

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part, lives of strictest celibacy, quaint mixtures of the warrior and the monk, they presided over the destinies of their tiny nation with a sense of responsibility that you will not find equaled by the standard of any ruling dynasty in Europe.

At the beginning of its existence, Montenegro was ruled by successive dynasties of princes, of which the last was the Chrnoievich. In 1516, however, the system of government was changed, and what were known as elective vladikas were installed. These elected bishops were assisted in the administration of temporal affairs by a civil governor, but the vladikas were seldom of the monkish sort. They were elected by the voivodes and people in open assembly, and afterward ordained, and in the generality of cases they were much more used to a suit of armor than a soutane.

After one hundred and eighty years of the elective vladikas, the people decided to alter the system somewhat. Experience had proved to them that the casual election of rulers bred weakness. It was resolved to try the scheme of centering the power in some strong family by making the office hereditary. Of course the crown could not be handed down from father to son, because by virtue of his office the Prince-Bishop was forbidden to marry. But he could be succeeded by a nephew, and down to recent times that has been the custom.

One ruler of the Petrovich was succeeded by his brother's son. Strangely enough, there was never any jealousy among the nephews who were passed over.

For instance, the father of Czar Nicholas, Mirko, known as the "Sword of Montenegro"—the most famous warrior the little land can boast and a stalwart bulwark against the invasions of the Turks which threatened Montenegro until 1878, when Russia put a stop once and for all to Moslem aggression in Europe—was twice passed over for the throne, the second time in favor of his own son. Yet he fought cheerfully both for his brother and his son and never showed a trace of ill-feeling, although, as has been said, he has always been regarded as the best leader the Black Mountain men ever had.

To tell the story of Czar Nicholas, the first of the Montenegrin rulers to wear a kingly crown, means the telling of the story of his country throughout his reign.

It is not a story which can be lightly told, either, for it involves description of several of the most stirring combats which have taken place since the days of the Crusades. It means a delineation of the smallest nation in the world, the most compact and, in some ways, the most successful. It means a review of all the countless political questions which have rent southeastern Europe in the past half-century and more. It means a recitation of facts unknown to most Americans, which postulate a state of civilization almost unbelievably primitive in this day of the wireless and aeroplane.

In the first place, it is necessary to give a brief sketch of the land of Montenegro, or Tchernagora—"The Black Mountain," to call it by the name its inhabitants love best. Montenegro was colonized in the last decade of the fourteenth century by noble families from Macedonia, Servia and Bulgaria, the pick of the old Slav aristocracy, who fled from their upland castles in the Rhodope hills after the battle of Kossovo in 1389, when the Turks completely crushed the Christian power in the Balkan Peninsula, and the great Bulgar-Serb Empire, which had been numbered among the mightiest in Europe, went down to everlasting defeat.

From that time on, the story of Montenegro is the story of endless battles, wars, sieges, raids, forays and encounters with the Turks, varied occasionally by combats with the Venetians, who made several abortive attempts to scale the impregnable road known as the "Montenegrin Ladder," which runs from the Bocca di Cattaro up to Cettinje, and, later, combats with the French and Austrians.

Time and again the Turkish Sultans and their viceroys, the Pashas of Albania, Bosnia and the Herzegovina, endeavored to conquer the tiny land. For four hundred and fifty years, army after army, led by the Janissaries and the best generals Turkey could produce, attempted to conquer Montenegro and failed. During the first half of the last century the warfare between the little principality and its great enemy was almost unceasing. In the reign of Danilo II., uncle of Nicholas, a number of tremendous battles were fought.

In fact, when Danilo was assassinated—incidentally, he was the only Montenegrin ruler in centuries to meet death in that way—a renewal of hostilities was already imminent. Danilo was the first of the Princes of the House of Petrovich, it may be well to

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add, to discard the ecclesiastical functions of the hereditary vladikas.

At the time he succeeded to the throne he was in love with a beautiful Serb lady, and he secured a change in the order of things, so that he might gratify his desire to marry her. But inasmuch as he left no male heir, the traditional custom of the house was preserved at his untimely death, and his nephew Nicholas succeeded him. Nicholas, however, will be succeeded by his own eldest son, Danilo, third of that name, who will be the first ruler of Montenegro to follow his father on the throne since the days of the last of the Black Princes.

A WESTERN TRAINING FOR KINGHOOD

FIVE years before the time came for Nicholas to ascend the throne, his destiny had been determined upon, and as his uncle was a man of considerable foresight and no small intellectual attainments, it was determined that the heir-apparent should be given a first-class Western education in preparation for his assuming the responsibilities of leader of his people.

Accordingly, after a preparatory course in the home of his aunt in Trieste—where he imbibed principally hatred of the Austrians, who were becoming almost as dangerous enemies of Montenegro as the Turks—he was shipped off to Paris, where he studied at the Academy of Louis-le-Grand, and obtained some proficiency in French, Italian and German, besides Serb history and other more usual branches of knowledge. At this time the educational facilities of Montenegro were almost nil. Few people, other than the priests, knew how to read and write.

One of the stories his subjects have always liked best to tell deals with this period of Nicholas's life, when the set routine of Paris irked him, and the oppressive atmosphere of the class-rooms stifled him and he sighed for the fresh air of the gaunt mountains where his childhood had been spent. To this stage of his career his poetical development owes much. Beyond question, the early separation from home was markedly instrumental in stimulating the fanciful creative vein which afterward made itself manifest in work that has entitled him to a place among the leaders of the renaissance in Servian literature.

Even if Nicholas had not been a king he would have deserved commendation and a distinctive place in the history of his country through his literary endeavors. Besides a volume of poetry, he has written several poetic dramas, including "The Empress of the Balkans" and "Prince Arbanit," all dealing with Serb history, and declared to possess unusual merit by French reviewers. Indeed there is much Serb poetry of unusual beauty which is unknown to the rest of Europe, simply for lack of a sympathetic translator.

Nicholas has only shared the lot of many of his subjects in remaining unknown to the book-lovers of his generation in other lands. One can imagine the celerity with which a volume by the Kaiser would be seized upon. Yet nobody has even attempted to translate the writings of a man who has been proclaimed a genius of the first rank in the columns of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and other critical publications.

Whenever young Nicholas could escape from the dull round of his studies in Paris, he would seek the fresh air of the woods and mountains, going on excursions to Versailles or St. Germain or to country districts more remote. He learned from the best French masters to shoot and ride and fence, so that in after-life he was able to vie with the most accomplished of his voivodes in these manly pursuits. The traditions of his House he had imbibed in his cradle, when his mother sang over him the ballads made by the old bards centuries back, in which the stories of invasion and massacre, primitive as the sagas of Iceland, are described with a certain savage zest.

He was not quite nineteen when he was called to take his uncle's place. Two months later he married Milena Voukovich, daughter of one of the principal voivodes, who had been a brother-in-arms of his father, Mirko. The Czarina Milena is still one of the handsomest women in Europe. She stood shoulder to shoulder with her husband throughout all the trials and adversities of his eventful reign, at times when he was driven from pillar to post by the Moslem hordes that were poured through the defiles of the Lovchen range in wave after wave, so that even the brave Black Mountain men quailed under the attack and sought safety on the impassable mountain heights.

They had peace of a kind for a year, and then war broke out with redoubled violence. The insurrection of the rayahs, or Christian peasants of the Herzegovina, aroused the

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sympathies of the Montenegrins, and young Prince Nicholas found his hands full trying to obey the injunctions of the Great Powers to refrain from hostilities and keep his fiery subjects in check.

For some months he held out against the wishes of the nation, with somewhat dubious success. He honestly did his best to remain neutral; he even consented to allow the Turks to send their convoys across Montenegrin territory. But he could not be everywhere on the frontier at once, and whenever his back was turned, the Montenegrins flew at their hereditary enemies.

A series of "frontier incidents"—"frontier incident" is the designation for any fracas along the Montenegrin border which results in fatalities—followed close upon one another's heels. The Turks grasped eagerly at the chance they had been looking for. Omar Pasha, Viceroy of the Western Provinces, one of the bitterest foes of Montenegro, threw a huge army across the frontier, undeterred by his previous defeats at the hands of Mirko. It was reasoned in Constantinople that young Nicholas had earned the dislike of his subjects by his peace policy, and that now, while there was turmoil in the Christian camp, Turkey might find it easy to crack the nut which had resisted so many efforts for so many hundreds of years.

THE BOY-GENERAL

BUT things did not turn out exactly as Turkey had anticipated. A great part of the principality was overrun, most of the villages were destroyed and ruin stared every one in the face. Omar's army had entered the country in three divisions, aiming to comb it from side to side, and making their principal effort against the valley of the Zeta, which might be called the high-road of Montenegro, the main artery of its life. But, led by the giant fighter, Mirko, and their boy-prince—in whom they trusted implicitly, once he had sanctioned war—the Montenegrins took up unflinchingly the struggle of their fathers. The Turks were assailed from every height, from the sides of every pass.

True, the valley of the Zeta fell into the invaders' hands, but on little else could they keep their grip for long. The war was fought with a fierce, unrelenting fanaticism which is all but incomprehensible to the Western mind. The story of this bitter warfare reads like the Scandinavian sagas. It is difficult to believe that such battles were actually fought by modern men in contemporaneous times.

The deeds that were done sound like the achievements of the God-Men of the mythical age, or the half-imaginative accounts of the ancient Norse sea-kings.

Indeed, what saga could surpass the tale of how Mirko and his twenty-six followers held the Upper Monastery of Ostrog above the Zeta against thousands of foes and beat them off? Or of how Mirko and the boy-prince, with a mere handful of followers and the barest kind of rations to subsist on, defeated the Turkish army in a pitched battle at Rjeka?

In return for a series of unparalleled disasters, the whole might of the Turkish Empire was concentrated against this handful of mountaineers. Thousands of trained soldiers, the best soldiers Turkey could put in the field, the Albanian battalions and the Imperial Guard that had taken the place of the Janissaries, were despatched to the front and, after sixty battles, the Montenegrins were glad to meet their foes halfway.

They conceded some unimportant points and won a breathing-spell. They needed it badly. It was not valor they lacked, but food. The scanty crops of the rock-bound land had been laid waste, and scarce a family but was starving when peace was declared, while, although the Turks could not win their mountain peaks, from every peak the besieged looked down on serried battalions and grinning cannon.

Cholera followed in the wake of famine, and despite the assistance of France, which sent shiploads of corn to arrest the ravages of hunger, many who had survived the bullet and steel of the Turkish armies were carried off by the scourge of disease, among them Mirko, "the Sword."

The loss of his father was a great blow to young Nicholas, who had often relied upon his judgment and advice. But no man, however young, could have gone through the experiences which had been the prince's lot during the few years of his reign without learning much thereby.

Nicholas realized that it was as certain as such things could be that sooner or later he would have another war with Turkey on his hands. He set out to prepare for it

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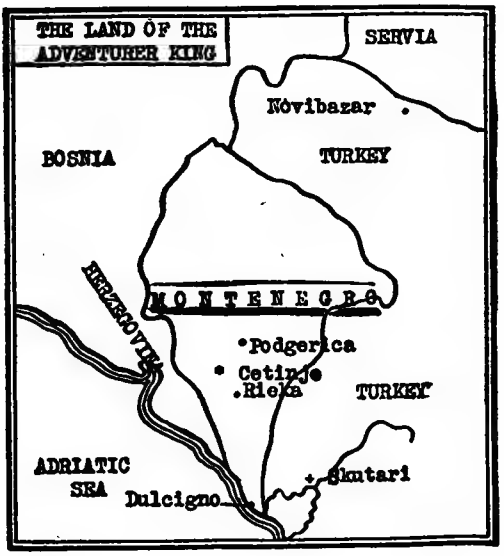
almost before hostilities had been concluded. He secured large quantities of modern rifles and artillery—an arm in which the Montenegrins had been sadly crippled—and instituted a systematic plan of military organization, on the model of the greater European nations.

The result was that Turkey feared to wring from Montenegro all the privileges the Sultan had really gained under the last treaty. The war had been as exhausting in its way for the Turks as for the Montenegrins. They had brought home to them the old proverb, of which no Montenegrin knows the beginning, that "In Montenegro a small army is defeated; a large army starves to death." Omar Pasha had wasted thousands of lives on this cluster of barren rocks, and what had been gained by it? Exactly what so many previous generations had gained—hard blows to be nursed and hopes of future revenge; nothing more.

During the next fourteen years there were many covert outbreaks along the frontier. In fact such affairs have always been regular topics of gossip in Montenegro up to the present time. In that wild land it is so easy to slip across the border and do a little raiding and burning, and then slip back again, that any man with a good rifle to try out and a roving disposition can scarcely be blamed for abandoning himself to the temptation. Of course the Prince could never participate in such affairs himself, and outwardly he frowned upon them. But they took place regularly, and he made no determined effort to prevent them. It was good shooting practise, and as such worth more than minted gold in building up efficiency and morale. And Prince Nicholas was waiting his next chance.

FIGHT FOR YOUR BROTHERS!

IT CAME in 1876, when Servia declared war all by herself against Turkey, and Montenegro threw in the whole force and weight of her 190,000 inhabitants with Servia's 2,000,000. There had been some rumor of a Russian declaration of war against the Sultan. But Montenegro did not wait for this. That was not the Montenegrin way. "Fight for your brothers against any odds:" that is the Montenegrin creed, and Prince Nicholas acted upon it. The blood of Tchernagora ran as hotly as of old. But there was more than



hot blood and desperate courage to throw into the balance for the principality this time. There was the result of all the scientific preparations Nicholas had been making for fourteen years.

His increased standard of efficiency told right at the start, when he was able to rally 20,000 men to his standard—the largest army Montenegro had ever put in the field. Instead of waiting for the Turks to attack, he pressed the war into the enemy's country. At the head of his army he crossed the frontier into the Herzegovina, and smashed Mouktar Pasha at Vuchidol, winning a victory which placed the entire duchy at his mercy. In the meantime, while Servia was being soundly thrashed by the Turks, Nicholas's cousin, Bozo Petrovich, at the head of the southern army, twice defeated Mahmoud Pasha at Medun, and, after a siege of four months, captured the city—a prize the Montenegrins had sought for many years.

By this time the Turks were fully awake to the seriousness of the situation upon their western flank. Russia had not yet struck, and the Sultan's advisers were anxious to be rid of this crafty enemy who always seemed to elude their blows. But in order to gain time to bring up forces that they confidently expected would be able once and for all to humble Montenegro's pride, the Turks sued for peace. And with the knightly trust which is one of the traits of his nation, Nicholas sent commissioners to Constantinople in the Fall of the year.

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But, as he might have known, the negotiations came to nothing. In the interim, too, peace had been made with Servia, that country having thanklessly deserted her little ally, and Suleiman Pasha, at the head of a great army released from service in Macedonia, was despatched to resume operations against the Black Mountain men.

But Nicholas was ready for them. He was not the son of his father, stout old Mirko, for nothing. Moreover, he joined to Mirko's headlong valor a cunning sagacity which the older man had lacked. Feigning flight and demoralization, the Prince withdrew up the valley of the Zeta, theater of his first military operations, and Suleiman pressed hotly after him. Nicholas even permitted the Turk to occupy the historic monastery of Ostrog, which had never before felt the tread of Moslem feet.

But this was all he conceded. In the narrow defiles of the upper end of the valley the unwieldy columns of the invaders were ambushed and overthrown. They were taken completely by surprise and almost surrounded. The Montenegrins slew until they were weary of slaying, and at last, with a loss of half his men, Suleiman made good his retreat, faced with the unwelcome task of having to explain to his master a boastful despatch in which he had asked to be appointed first Turkish governor of the principality.

By this time Russia had decided to cast in her lot with the tiny segment of the Slavs who held out against Moslem oppression in southeastern Europe, and the thunder of the Russian cannon reëchoed through the Rhodope passes. Nicholas, born general that he was, having assured himself that he had no more to fear from Suleiman for the time being, detached Bozo Petrovich with a small force to watch the southern marches and the remnant of Suleiman's army at Spuz. With the rest of his levies he hastened across the principality northward to Niksic, just across the Herzegovinian frontier.

By means of a series of combats that he afterward loved to style "Homeric" in his moments of reminiscence, the Prince compelled Niksic to capitulate, an achievement which, in his people's opinion, overshadowed all the others of the war, for Niksic had stood for centuries a threatening outpost of the Moslem power at their very gates. Then, unwearied by the months of steady fighting, the Prince countermarched his army to the south, pressed on to the seacoast, and for the first time in the centuries of Montenegro's existence, the Montenegrin eagles bathed in the brine of the Adriatic. Antivari and Dulcigno both fell, and Skutari—the "bloody Skutari" of the Montenegrin ballads—was besieged, when news of peace came.

Well might Nicholas sit back content. In a succession of campaigns that had met with unbroken victory, he had pushed forward his frontiers in every direction. He had reduced every Turkish fortress within striking distance of his frontiers, save Skutari. Most important of all, he had extended his conquests to the sea, and now might expect for his country to have that connection with the outer world which only a seacoast and ports can give.

Indeed, although the Congress of Berlin was not so generous to Montenegro as had been hoped and Dulcigno was restored to the Turk, still the area of the country was doubled, the population increased by 100,000, and Antivari and its harbor confirmed to Tchernagora.

Well might Nicholas be content. He had already achieved more in his reign than any of his predecessors had been able to do. He had not only preserved his country's integrity as they had done, but he had also enlarged it and added to its prestige and given it a place of importance in the eyes of Europe.

For a few days after peace was declared the younger inhabitants of the principality feared that their swords must rust in their scabbards. But without any assistance trouble blazed out along the new frontier, where the residents of several Albanian districts, which had been arbitrarily added to Montenegro by the Berlin Congress, revolted against their new masters. Albanians and Montenegrins went at each other hammer and tongs, as cheerfully as if they had not just concluded a ferocious two years' war.

The Great Powers began to fear that this spark might start some new conflagration. Accordingly strong representations were made at Constantinople that the Porte should meet the principality halfway. In other words, at Prince Nicholas's suggestion the Powers intimated that Turkey should hand back Dulcigno to its conquerors and accept in return the Albanian

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districts which preferred Turkey's rule to the Prince's.

The Turks demurred, but a naval demonstration off Dulcigno, together with various significant movements on the part of Nicholas, convinced them that they had better yield. So Nicholas and his Black Mountain men entered Dulcigno for the second time.

It was then that peace came in earnest—peace of a certain kind, that is. For it verily seems as if Montenegrins could never live without some measure of fighting. From 1880 until the Fall of 1912 the land remained outwardly at peace. Commerce, which it had never known before, was born with the achievement of a seacoast. Under the impetus of better public education and a benevolently despotic rule, Nicholas's subjects waxed steadily happier and more prosperous. His army reforms, which had been only partly carried out when war with Turkey began in 1876, were broached again, and many matters of state placed upon a more systematic basis, for Nicholas was a man who could see his country's defects as well as her virtues.

THE PEACE OF THE BLACK MOUNTAIN

BUT simply because civilization progressed in these times of unwonted outward peace, it must not be supposed that the young bloods of the principality were deprived of their accustomed sport. Far from it! The Turk, to be sure, had been almost completely obliterated from Montenegro's borders. Only where they were contiguous with Albania did the fez-topped sentinels guard the opposing blockhouses. Austria was now the power the Montenegrins feared and hated most. Austrian governors ruled Bosnia and the Herzegovina, and the sanjak of Novibazar, between Montenegro and Servia, was occupied by Austrian troops.

Conversely, Austrian gendarmes and frontier patrols were just as good targets for Montenegrin rifles as Turks had been, more especially when the Bosnians and Herzegovinians, blood-brethren of the Montenegrins, rose in revolt against the Austrian overlords, as they occasionally did. Of course, these things were managed very cannily. It was seldom possible for the Austrian Government to bring the blame home to Nicholas's subjects. When they did, upon rare occasions, Prince Nicholas was always outwardly stern with his recalcitrant young men and straightway banished them from his dominions. As soon as the trouble had blown over, though, they would slip back again, and nobody would be the wiser. It was lots of fun for the Montenegrins, it kept the flame of revolt in Austria's annexed provinces from utterly dying down, and the Slavs throughout the Balkan peninsula thoroughly enjoyed the reports of the Austrian casualties.

Now and then, by way of change, the Montenegrins would raid Albanian territory, and occasionally the alarm would spread through the frontier villages that the Mallissori tribesmen or one of the other Albanian Mohammedan clans were on the war-path. The beacon-fires would blaze on all the mountain-tops, and the young mountaineers would strap on cartridge-pouch and bayonet and set out for the rallying-point, burning to equal the wild tales of combats told by the veterans of '76, '60, '58 and all of the campaigns which had preceded them, in the reigns of Danilo II. and his predecessor, Peter II.

So passed more than thirty years—eventful they would have been called in any other part of Europe, but somewhat dreary for Montenegro. Prince Nicholas and the stately Princess Milena grew older, and their nine children grew from toddlers to manhood and womanhood, six fine girls and three strapping boys, each of them a six-footer, with the proportions of a half-back, like all of the men of their race.

The girls married well: one of them King Victor Emmanuel of Italy, whose subjects love her, even as her own country-people love her; another, a Russian Grand Duke close to the throne; a third, Peter Karageorgevich, formerly pretender to the Servian throne, who succeeded the assassinated King Alexander and led his countrymen to victory in the stirring campaign of the Balkan Confederation last Fall. She did not live to share her husband's good fortune, however.

The other and younger girls will either marry sons of the leading voivodes of their own country or else foreign princelings. It is an axiom of European courts that no husband is too high-born for a princess of the House of Petrovich. They can wed where they choose, and perhaps will give further point to their father's famous

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remark to the foreign diplomat who once twitted him on his country's scarcity of exports.

"Perhaps," answered Nicholas gently, "yet we export queens and the mothers of kings, women that all men are eager to wed."

When Nicholas first came to the throne he assumed the state of his ancestors. Now, although Montenegro had been independent all the hundreds of years since Kossovo, the only independent Christian country in southeastern Europe for centuries, perhaps the only country in Europe which had never been conquered, her ruler was only a plain Highness to other rulers. Nicholas and his subjects thought this inadequate to the dignity of the position and the prestige of their race, and some years back he proclaimed himself a Royal Highness, the several powers of Europe all ratifying his self-promotion. Finally, in 1910, on the fiftieth anniversary of his accession, he proclaimed himself Czar, and again, without a murmur, the Great Powers assented, willing to admit that no rank was too exalted for the man who had ruled Montenegro as Nicholas had ruled it for fifty years.

THE CRUSADER-KING

SO LONG ago as 1868, of his own free-will and without any pressure—indeed, in the face of the opposition of many of his advisers—he voluntarily granted the country a constitution and abrogated his despotic powers, in form at least—for as a matter of fact so long as Nicholas lives the government of Montenegro will be a benevolent despotism, by and with the glad consent of the people.

Since then he has granted other reforms and has done everything possible to promote the individuality and talent for self-government of his subjects. But he has never permitted anything which might hinder his country's military prowess, for all through the years of peace that followed 1880 Nicholas never forgot that he was Prince of a race of warriors, in practical effect the Grand Master of an order of crusaders, whose ancestors had founded it in the Dark Ages to be a bulwark of Christendom and a bright sword for the Faith.

It is as fierce, ruthlessly fanatical crusaders that I like best to think of Nicholas and his people: such crusaders as followed Richard the Lion-Heart to within sight of the walls of Jerusalem; of the same caliber as the Franks of the Fourth Crusade, who, under Dandolo, Count Baldwin and Montserrat stormed Constantinople and set up on the shores of the Bosphorus a Latin Empire that might have checked the Moslem tidal wave had Europe backed them up. Of such stuff are Nicholas and his Black Mountain men, medieval, scarcely civilized, perhaps, but such fighters as the world seldom sees in this day of scientific destruction. Men, too, who are willing to adventure their all, to stake their last cartridge, upon the issue at stake, so be it seems the right.

Great men—mighty men-at-arms—true adventurers! Can't you imagine how Edward III. and the Black Prince and Sir Walter de Manny and Du Guesclin and Chandos and the others who set the standard of chivalry at Cressy and Poictiers and many another hard-fought field, would have welcomed Nicholas and his father, Mirko, who always fought with a song on his lips; and Bozo Petrovich, and old General Martinovich, fighters who fought after the manner of the thirteenth century, rather than the twentieth, for the ideals that the thirteenth held highest?

If you have blood in your veins that races a trifle faster in times of danger and peril, I think you will agree with me that you would prefer to change places—provided you had to be a king at all—with Czar Nicholas, Prince of the Zeta, Voivode of Brda, and Gospodar of Tchernagora, rather than any other monarch of them all!

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DOWN THE OLD MISSISSIPP'

HOW THREE MEN AND A MOTOR-BOAT DRIFTED INTO AMUSING ADVENTURES AMONG THE RIVER-FOLK

by

RAYMOND S. SPEARS

SYNOPSIS—Calliper, Wattics and Coaner, of Utica, N. Y., are loafing down the Mississippi by motor-boat. They pick up a clever and affable stranger named Doldrum, who knows all the devious ways of the river and river-folk, to which they are very green. Doldrum assists them in getting back their boat when it is stolen by Steve Bain, a homeless river-rat. Steve has to swim ashore from the stolen boat. At Hetecs Landing, Steve begs a meal from Lillian Lotus Quallam, a beautiful girl born on the river, who runs a soda-water boat. Just then the motor-boat lands in at Hetecs and Steve hastens off. Doldrum, who is rather a mystery, goes up-town and amuses himself by picking the pockets of a crowd and stuffing the spoil in the pockets of a darky. Suspected and jailed, Doldrum cheerfully picks the jail-locks, lifts the guns of the crowd who want to lynch him, and gets the three tenderfeet to hurry off, with a story that once a year Hetecs is visited by the ghost of a mob. He has told them so much of the mystery of the river-bottoms that they almost believe him, and are starting down-river when they hear, from the darkness, a woman's scream for help.

CHAPTER VII

STEVE BAIN IS IN LUCK

WHEN Steve Bain wandered up-town, after the soda-water-boat girl had fed him, he was the poorest man in town, except for his full meal. He had no coat, no hat and only a dollar in money, but he was a cheerful river-rat for all that. He strolled along through the back street unobtrusively, looking at what he could see, and wondering whimsically what he would do next. When night fell, he ventured out into the main part of the town, and passed the post-office as the stage drove up. He continued on down Main Street into Jail Street and, across from the jail, he spied a shack. He inspected the shack, and found it full of cotton-bales, one of the bales broken open.

"Jest 'zactly my luck!" he muttered to himself, and crawled into the cotton, with a piece of burlap spread out to keep the stuff from filling his mouth, eyes and nostrils. In two minutes he was sound asleep.

Miss Quallam, the soda-water-boat lady, was up-town, too, calling on Mrs. Merriwas, an old river friend of the family. The Merriwases had dropped down the Tennessee River out of the Big Holston, years before, on their way to Texas, but after several trips on the Mississippi in house-boats had settled at Hetecs Landing on a little place where they raised garden-truck, and were growing rich, selling vegetables to the town and to the plantation-owners, for all the farmers thereabouts raise nothing but cotton. They heard the howling of the mob, and Mr. Merriwas excused himself, while the ladies went into less general and

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much more intimate conversation than had prevailed before.

It was Miss Quallam's scream that the four on the launch heard. When she had arrived at the landing, Miss Quallam found her house-boat gone, and no sign of it anywhere on the river. And with the boat had gone her mother. Of course the daughter screamed, for there was nothing else to do.

AWAKENED from a sound sleep by the hoarse roar of the mob, Steve Bain had stumbled out of the bale of cotton in the shack, alarmed and hardly more than half awake. He knew the temper of mobs, and when he looked out into Jail Street and saw the mob coming, with a rope across its front, he did not stop to wonder what he had been doing that any mob should be coming to hang him. He darted out of the shack, swung around the corner into the shadow and headed for the river, as naturally as a coon takes to trees when pursued by dogs.

He raced blindly, with the terror of those who never know when fate will overtake them. He leaped a board fence at a bound and broke through the badly rusted wire fence on the other side of that field. Clear of the edge of the town, he came to the levee. At the landing-eddy he swung down to the soda-water-boat and, without stopping to consider, he cast off the lines and sprang aboard. When she had given him the snack, Miss Quallam had casually mentioned that she was going to go up-town visiting that evening, but had forgotten to say that her mother was going to stay aboard to watch the boat—and her mother had gone to bed early that night.

Steve Bain made no noise when he went afloat—trust a shy old river-rat for that! When the lines were cast off, he poled the boat out into the eddy, as softly as a chip, and the reverse current carried it up the eddy, out into the main current and downstream, with no more disturbance than a drifting canoe.

"Lawse! Ain't I in luck!" Steve muttered, listening to the distant roar of the mob. "I wondeh what they 'lowed I be'n doin'? Sho! I seen one ole woman lookin' at me right sharp—an' a feller done the same! Lawse, I'd shore be'n in trouble, if I hadn't yearn them comin'!"

With natural caution, he slid into the soda-water cabin and tried the cabin door. It was locked, and Steve let the knob turn noiseless back to normal. Hanging on the wall behind the counter was a cloak, which he slid over his shirt. After a glance at the receding Hetecs Landing lights he curled up on the floor, to go to sleep again, leaving the cabin-boat floating down the river. He had made his getaway and, like a fox, found a new hole. If it was not so warm and comfortable as the inside of the cotton-bale, it was infinitely safer, for the time being, at least. Anyhow, the morrow would take care of itself.

As he lost his senses, he snuffled gently, "Lawse!" he muttered, "won't Lillian Lotus be b'ilin'—an' that mother of hern—a feller could see her ten mile, she'll be that het up!"

So the soda-water boat floated away down the river at about four miles an hour (the river was pretty low) and a few hours later it swung into the Willans Eddy, where it floated around and around, down the outside next to the river current, and up the inside next to the bank, a turn around every forty minutes with monotonous regularity.

MORNING came, and dawn. Steve slept on, as tired men will. Suddenly he was awakened by a shriek and, when he opened his eyes, he found himself looking into the muzzle of a short double-barreled shotgun. At the breech was a cold gray eye and a sallow face.

"Whar's my gal? Whar's my darter?" the specter demanded, and Steve rolled his eyes.

"Lawd!" he begged, rolling up to his knees and clasping his hands before him, "don' shoot, lady! Don' shoot!"

"Whar's that gal, you dod-fo'saken riveh-rat? Whar's my precious little Lillian Lotus? Talk up er I'll blow your darned haid off!"

"Lawd, I ain' done no harm to nobody, lady. I jes'—— Don' p'int that gun thataway—hit mout go off——"

"Bet yer life it might! Whar's that gal?"

"She's—she's back to Hetecs, ma'am—she tole me—she 'lowed she'd—she expaicted she'd—you see, I'm—I'm Stevens, an' she said—I'm Steve Bain. You hearn about me, ma'am——"

"Yes, you river-rat. No good I've hearn of you! What you doin' yere?"

"You see, lady, we don' harm no river-

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folkses—you know that. Real river-rats jes'—jes' rubs the bank——"

"Yes—that's so!"

"Well, you see, your darter—she 'lowed—she 'lowed I should take cyar of you all. You see she's—you know——"

"Well, what do I know, you dod-ratted tongue-tied numbskull—— You talk right up er I'll shoot the liver an' lights outen you! What about my darter, now? Lawse! Settin' you to take cyar o' me! Who eveh hearn of sech a thing!"

"Yassum, you see, when she 'lowed she'd—when she reckoned she git married——"

"What? What? Lillian Lotus Quallam marrit? I'll kill her man! What she do that for? Who'll take cyar of me?"

"That's jes' hit, Mrs. Quallam. Lillian knowed I war jes' a faithful, stiddy, good-hearted ole river-rat, an' she said you an' me could run the sody-water boat. She knowed you'd be mad, her marrying one of them——"

"Who'd she marry — some dod-ratted——"

"No'm. A sport. A feller—one of some fellers into a gasoline——"

"One of them four fellers in the *Moonshine?* Lawd, an' I neveh knowed hit! Goodness! When'd they do their courting? I'll husband her man! Mebbe you think I won't! An' she 'lowed you'd take cyar of me! She take a sport, an' give you to me? Lawd! Why—why——"

The old woman stormed up and down, while Steve wiped the sweat from his face, sympathizing with her and dodging her by turns, as her temper changed.

"Yassum," he said, "Lillian 'lowed you'd be peaceable by the time you got to Memphis, and then she 'lowed I'd let her know. She took the train to Memphis, ma'm, an' she'll be waitin' there."

"Train from Hetecs Landing? You're lyin' to me, you——"

"No'm—stage from Hetecs, 'cross to Obion, an' the train from thar. An' I 'lowed we'd float right on to Memphis, neveh stoppin', an' git thar whiles you was good an' fresh, an' hadn't forgot what your 'lowed to say to her an' her husband——"

"They's sense in that. To Memphis by train? Well, I reckon we'll trip'r right through to Memphis without tying a line!"

"Yassum! I'll pull right out this yeah eddy, an' we'll drap right down!"

Steve shuffled out of the girl's old cloak, and set the sweeps, to row out of the eddy. In a few minutes they were in mid-current again, with Steve taking frequent glances astern, happy in the loneliness of the river up-stream. There was no wind and no sunlight—a balmy southern Autumn day, but when Mrs. Quallam called Steve to breakfast a little later, there was a whiff of wind, which increased suddenly to a dry gale, which drove them broadside at the caving wooded bank just above Forked Deer Island.

In spite of the united strength of the two on the oars, it seemed as though they must wreck under the bank.

Just as they dropped the sweeps to pick up poles, however, hoping to ease themselves into some narrow eddy, a little bayou opened before them in the bank and, by hard work, they guided the boat into this and a hundred yards up it to where they could make a fine landing against a cypress snag, which bridged the mud along the bayou and extended up to the level bottoms.

"Whew!" the old lady remarked, drawing her lean arm across her forehead. "That was some pullin'! Dod rat the wind! If it holds, we won't git into Memphis fer a week!"

"No'm!"

"But when we do git in, —— he'p my gal's husband!"

"Yassum!"

STEVE was restless, for the last thing his kind could do was keep still and do nothing. He took the axe, went up the snag and cut up some dry kindlings. Then he cut up an ash limb for body wood. The gale, however, kept on, and in an hour or two amusement and occupation in the slough were gone. Steve fidgeted from end to end of the cabin-boat, up the bank and back again.

"For the lan's sake," Mrs. Quallam exclaimed at last, "cayn't yo' sit still!"

"No'm. I jes' gotter be doin' sunthin', ma'am!"

"Well, you take Lillian's squirrel-rifle theh, an' go huntin'. I cayn't stan' you-all's flaxin' around. I like things quiet. Get aout with ye. An' if you hain't back fo' noon-time dinner, yo' can go hungry. I ain' goin' to have no meal settin' around unet all the afternoon."

"Yassum. I'll come back. Theh's ducks back yeah in the bottom bayous——"

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"You git a duck er two, an' we'll have a pot-pie. You could take the shotgun, on'y I cayn't shoot a rifle, an' a lady never knows when she'll need pertection on this ole Mississipp'!"

"Yassum. They's bad, mean, triflin' menfolks down this yeah river!" Steve remarked, with piety in his expression. "I won't be fur away, an' ef I hear any shootin', I'll come hellbentferelection!"

"Git a coon if ye can, Steve. Lillian ain' killed a coon in I don't know when, an' seems like I be'n gittin' coon-hongry. Say, what feller was it my gal married?"

"Why—why, a feller named Calliper, er Calliber er some sech name. I seen it writ. I seen it on hisn's launch!"

"Calliber, eh? I'll .44-caliber him, if I eveh ketch 'im in a lonely bend, you bet I will!"

"Yassum. Them sports is awful triflin'. Well, I reckon I'll go git a 'coon."

"All right. Good luck!"

"Thankee, ma'am!"

Steve ran lightly up the cypress snag into the woods. He heaved a sigh of relief.

"Lawse!" he muttered, "hit shore strains a feller, talkin' to one of them sharp ole river-ladies! Old Mrs. Quallam's a sharp ole lady, she is! I shore better git her that roast coon, er she'll git discontented. These yere woods is full of coons an' possums an' mebbe one'll be out, hit bein' kinder cloudy. Um-m. I wonder if Old Man Quallam didn't leave some ole clothes—a feller needs a coat, this kind of weather. I gotter git one somehow!"

CHAPTER VIII

A PRETTY GIRL IN DISTRESS

DOLDRUM had been skirting close to the bank as he steered the launch *Moonshine* in the river current. He had just scanned the lower landing-eddy three times in quick succession, trying to discover the soda-water boat which had been moored there, and was wondering if it had pulled out, when he heard the scream. He knew the voice, and a curse of hearty proportions welled up to his lips and hung there unsaid.

"Now dod rat it, we gotter go lady-rescuing!" he thought in his heart, and sure enough, the next instant, he heard the gallant sportsmen exclaim in unison:

"Run in! Run in! There's a woman screaming!"

Doldrum hesitated for a fraction, but Wattics started the engine, so Doldrum put the wheel over and ran the launch to the bank, where the young woman stood, shouting to them as they came. The search-light revealed her—Lillian Lotus Quallam, sure enough!

"Oh, gentlemen!" she cried, "my boat—my soda-water boat's stoled! And my mother's aboard of it!"

"Come right aboard, madam! We'll pursue it!" Calliper exclaimed. "We're only too glad to assist you!"

She was certainly a most attractive picture of a girl in distress on the bank, with the blue-rimmed spot-light around her, but she was a wise river-girl none the less.

"Who all mout you be?" she demanded.

"The Utica launch. We were here this afternoon. Just dropped in."

"Where yo' be'n? Oh! You're them fellers was on the jail steps to-night——"

"Why, yes, ma'm——"

"Well, that shanty-boat ain't far down the river. Hit's on'y ten o'clock. Hit ain't drifted more'n ten-fifteen miles."

"Come with us. We'll pursue it. Or we'll go on alone."

"I better go with ye. Maw'll be scared to death, if—if they ain't throwed her overboard!" Her voice caught, and she came up the gangplank to the bow deck, helped by Calliper. As she came aboard, at the bow, Doldrum leaped ashore from the stern, unnoticed by his companions, and climbed the levee noiselessly, whispering in his heart:

"Ain't this the dod-rattedest luck a feller ever had? Hyar I was all set up an' comfy for the Winter. That's what comes of havin' everybody know yer. I couldn't meet that Lillian. She'd shore split on me!"

He sat down at the side of the levee, behind a gum-tree, and watched the launch. The three men on board were busy, two poling out from the bank, the third starting the engine, and, when the boat was nicely going, all three gathered at the stern to console and comfort the lady in anxiety and distress.

"Lawse!" Doldrum muttered. "Look at that! If those fellers ain' the shiflesses', innocentes', dod-rattedes' fellers ever come down Ole Mississipp'! Theh goes their

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boat, nobody at the wheel, three-quarter speed ahead, an' a-swingin' all over the hull river! Lawse!"

The *Moonshine* moved out toward mid-stream, and as her rudder swung, so headed the boat. It ran in half-circles, some long, some short. One minute the search-light pointed to the east, the next to the west, and again it swept the levee, and reflected on the clouds, as the launch careened on a short turn.

"Ain' that the mos' exasperatin' thing!" Doldrum continued, as the boat floated away in the night, working down-stream, with an occasional dart up-stream, and quartering toward the banks and eddies. "How come that kind of fellers has so much, an' the res' of us so darned little? Sho! Wa'n't I a dod-ratted fool to let 'em git away. Lawse! I oughter tol' those fellers that was a ghost yellin'. Shucks! A feller never does think of nothin' when he'd orter! Well, I cayn't stay tell daylight in Hetecs Landin'. Somebody'd shore think sunthin', if they ketched me hyar in the mohnin'!"

HE CLIMBED to the back of the levee and piked away down-stream, his back humped up, disgusted with himself and with all the rest of the world to boot. He felt that he had been wasting his opportunities. But after a while, when he was out of sight of Hetecs Landing, and the levee was running through the wilderness of the bottoms, he fell into his stride and into a pleasanter mood.

He could hear owls hooting, the low noises of squeaking mice, the churring voice of 'possums and the rustling among the trees. It was only a point in the wilderness, where the levee crossed the sag at the head of an old river-lake. As soon as he had passed the sag, he came to cotton-fields again, and these had other sounds of their own, other glooms and fantasies. As he tramped on, the exasperation in his heart shaded away, growing lighter and lighter, and before long he was whistling like a bird, almost prancing down the back of the levee, care-free and light-spirited.

If luck had turned against him, so much the worse for luck. If he had lost one chance, it was not the first time. And if he had failed to make the most of his opportunity, another opportunity would be coming along after a while. In any event, thinking of the day that had come to a close, he had a laugh coming. Time had in some measure mollified his recklessness and softened his temper.

"I'm glad I didn't kill those fellers!" he admitted to himself, sobering down a bit. "I used to do a lot of meanness thataway, but shucks, they ain't no need on it! Those doughheads was more fun livin' than they'd be'n daid. Course, if I'd black-jacked 'em, I'd had the launch. But then I'd had them on my mind. Like's not, they got friends. Lots of that kind has 'em. An' if they'd found out they was missin', mebbe I'd be'n hunted around more'n common, an' had lots of trouble. A feller always does have trouble if he kills somebody they ain't no need of it. Um-m. Mebbe, soon's they drop that gal, I kin take up with 'em again. Walkin' ain't bad. I'd lots rather be set up the bank this kind of weather'n when hit's raining er b'ilin' hot. Lawse! I don' want to git back to Hetecs Landin' when they cayn't find none of their guns nowhar! Lucky thing foh me and them city sports I found that push-cart! Whoe-e! I had moh guns an' if I'd cracked a gun-store—whoe-e-e!"

He laughed as he thought of the night's adventures, then gave himself up to the joys of hitting the levee.

A thousand times he had tramped down the levee. He had traveled the levee-top when the sleet was falling, and to stop meant dying, cased in ice. He had strolled down the levee in bright moonlight, when the mocking-birds were singing and the orioles were answering from the gums. He had plodded along the levee, miles upon miles, when at intervals he met the levee-guards, the men who were watching lest the high water on the riverside break through the bank and flood the cotton-lands behind. He had waded through the snow on levee-tops, and through mud and through fragrant flowers and soft grasses. Two or three times, driven by hunger, he had worked on levees, from the core to the sodding. He knew the levee down Atchafalaya, the Reelfoot Levee, the St. Francis Bottoms Levee—all the levees from Cape Girardeau to New Orleans, and he had been pressed into levee-protection gangs at East St. Louis and Helena and down The Coast.

As he tramped along, the refrain that stirred his heart welled to his lips, and he began the old Levee Walking-Song:

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"Oh yes, we'll walk this levee round, round, round,
Looking for the boss that can't be found.
Oh yes, we'll walk this levee round, round, round,
As we tramp, tramp, tramp upon the cold, cold ground.
Oh yes——"

Swinging as he walked, loose-jointed, his arms hanging free, he strode on, his voice raised and his heart buoyant. Far out in the bottoms the sound of his song penetrated to the negro-quarters and to the rooms of the great plantation mansions, starting the sleepers into wakefulness, and, as they lifted their ears from their pillows, they would think:

"There goes a levee-walker. Um-m. He sounds like he was happy!"

And he was what they all thought—happy! No care could rest heavily on his shoulders, for he would shift it. No whimper of conscience tormented his heart, because he had never had one. No longing for a home ever troubled him, for he had never had one! There was no desire that he could not gratify, no danger that he could not dodge or overawe, no dread that could make him shrink, no hunger that he could not satisfy. He laughed while he sang, as though he were the only utterly, hopelessly, helplessly happy man in all the world.

But as the night lengthened out into the harsh, cold, weary hours of morning, his song flagged, and his gait grew less buoyant. He watched the east for signs of dawn and, night-bird that he was, he cast sidelong glances out across the bottoms and, at one place, he climbed a low telephone-pole to break the wire. That was in a lowland, and he contrived to hide the break among the wild grape-vines, for he did not want any word to go down the levee to catch and hold a little man who had never restrained his propensity to pick pockets, in season and out—those of friends, strangers, jailers or his own boon companions. A broken telephone-wire bears no tales.

Dawn came, and the levee entered a wilderness again. Doldrum, his levee-walking ecstasy nearly gone, began to wonder where he would get his breakfast or dinner or supper. It was, happily, a fair dawn, and before the wind rose, squirrels were leaping among the trees, and in one place a coon started across the levee in front of him—a fat, black coon. In a swift rush, Doldrum overtook it and with a broken limb he smashed its nose. He bled it, dressed it, snipped out the strong corns and swung it over his shoulder—fifteen pounds of good meat.

He laughed.

"Lawse!" he chuckled. "I shore'll git a dinner outen this yere! A man don' eveh starve to death on these yere Old Bottoms—who-e-e!"

Looking to right and left, he stopped and scratched his ear.

"This yere's somewheres down Forked Deer Island way. There's always shanty-boats there. I bet I better cross over to Forked Deer. I'd love to have some old shanty-boat lady roast this coon for me! I'll cross over to the chute and see."

So he cut down across the levee into the woods and, striking the head of a crooked little bayou, he followed it for nearly half a mile. Then, rounding a little turn, he stopped short with an exclamation:

"Sho!"

IT WAS the lost boat of Lillian Lotus Quallam, and on the bow was old Mrs. Quallam, sweeping the deck with the vigorous indignation which most ladies manifest against a dirty floor. She was mumbling to herself, and Doldrum heard her say:

" 'Pears like men-folks is the most triflin', muddy-footed, thickest-headed pussons in all the world. Why couldn't that feller scrup hisn's feet off?"

"I expect he warn' no gentleman," Doldrum remarked in a penetrating voice.

The woman jumped and flapped her arms with surprise.

"Lan' sakes!" she cried, squinting up at him. "Where'd you come from?"

"I jes' been walking the levee, Mrs. Quallam!"

"Sho! Oh, it's you is it? Well, what's your name this time? Ever senct I knowed you, you never had the same name twict. Lawse! Les' see—you was Billy Okal an' Sam Goodberry, an'——"

"I'm Billy Okal, this time!" Doldrum told her.

"Be'n up to some meanness, I expaict?"

"No, honest I ain't. I ain't killed nobody that I can remember in I don't know how long!"

"Shucks, you got a short mem'ry, you fellers have. What you got there?"

"A coon. I batted his nose on the levee

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this mornin'. I 'lowed I'd find some river-lady would roast him an' gimme a bite!"

"A coon! My lan'! I be'n sufferin' fer a coon. I'll cook 'im, Mr. What's-yer-name!"

"Doldrum."

"What! You 'lowed hit were Billy Okal!"

"I plumb forgot!"

"Lawse! Well, come abo'rd. Look out for that slick place on the cypress. My lan'! That *is* a coon, ain't hit! Two-year-old an' fat's a hog. Youm! I'll snatch that hide off an'——"

"Where's Lillian Lotus?"

"What you s'pose that gal went an' done? She went an' married a feller named Calliber——"

"What!"

"Yassuh! Oh, wait'll he meets hisn's mother-in-law. Lawd! I be'n sufferin' to git a holt of him. I'll .44-caliber him, the triflin', no-count spo'tin' white trash!"

"Gee! Why—why—when'd that——"

"Lawd! I don' know, an' that spo't sent a river-rat to took cyar of me. Cut me loose from Hetecs Landing last night, when I was asleep, and hyar I be, blowed in by the wind, an' jes' a b'ilin'. I want to meet that feller to Memphis. They 'lowed I'd get oveh b'ilin', time I got to Memphis! Fust time Lillian Lotus eveh did cut up such a caper. Gettin' married! Lawse!"

Mrs. Quallam threw her weight on the broom, her indignation was so great. Had there been the least speck of dirt on the deck, it would have been discouraged for life after that.

Doldrum made no answer. He searched his mind for something to say, but thought better of it. When a man doesn't know where he is at, the best thing to do is say nothing or tell a lie or change the subject, but if the other is talking, let 'er talk! That is good river-sense. What one doesn't say never comes back at him.

Mrs. Quallam took the coon and led the way back to the kitchen, where Doldrum sat down and crossed his knees, while Mrs. Quallam made the fur fly. She expressed her approval of the work already done on the coon, and when she had hung the carcass out on the stern deck to cool she sat down a minute to pass the time of day with her visitor.

"My lan'!" she laughed and chuckled. "Hit's the bes' joke you ever hearn tell on. That feller went out coon-huntin' this mornin', an' hyar I got a coon hung up already!"

"What feller?"

"Why that feller my daughter sent to cut me loose and float down the river—Steve Bain——"

"Wha-a-at!" Doldrum exclaimed, starting to his eet, and shrinking with apprehension, reaching to feel of his hip-pocket, "an' I ain't got no gun!"

"Why—what's between you an' Steve?" the woman asked.

JUST then there was a hail from up the bank, and Mrs. Quallam trotted to the bow to answer, while Doldrum rolled his eyes and thought:

"Ain't I a darn fool! I never saved one of them guns for myself!"

"Come right abo'rd!" he heard Mrs. Quallam say and, glancing through the window, he saw Calliper, in all the glory of corduroys, new shotgun and relieved expression coming down the cypress-log, lured by the genial welcome of Mrs. Quallam.

"You see," Calliper was explaining, "I became confused here in the Bottoms. I could not find my way. My name's Calliper—Ralph Calliper, and I'm from Utica, New York. Not at all used to these level flats, and so I was lost——"

"I see," Doldrum heard the woman answer. "Um-m. A purty gun yo' got there. Lemme see it?"

"Certainly. A very beautiful lightweight—— Eh—what!" Doldrum heard him say, then, from Mrs. Quallam:

"I'll what you, Mr. Twenty-Two-Caliber man, you, I'll l'arn you to go 'loping with a river-lady's darter! Hands up!"

CHAPTER IX

THE RIDICULOUSEST THING

ON BOARD the *Moonshine*, careening away down the Mississippi, with no one at the wheel, the three sportsmen, Calliper, Wattics and Coaner, were sitting before Miss Lillian Lotus Quallam, the soda-water-boat girl, while she explained.

She said she had gone up-town to visit the Merriwases, and that her mother had said she was going to bed early. The boat was well tied to the bank, two half-hitches and a bight around the line at each stake, excepting on the snag where the port-

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stern-line was tied, and that was a turn around the snag and two bights on the line—those knots never would slip, she declared with emphasis.

As she talked, the boat tipped first one way and then the other, and there was a rattle and a chug to the movement that she didn't fully understand. After one sudden turn, she exclaimed:

"My land! Has the wind come up?"

The three "guessed not" in unison, and Calliper remarked:

"We were just going to start down the river to travel at night. Doldrum there said it would be an interesting experience."

"Doldrum? Who's he?"

"Oh, he's an old river-sportsman—friend of ours. Mighty good fellow. Knows all about the river."

"Been on the river long?"

"Yes—off and on for years."

"I don't remember that name. Never heard of him. Gracious! How this boat does tip an' turn. Is he steerin'?"

"Yes—in the stern. You see, we've got two wheels on this boat. We can steer from the stern by the engine, or from the bow there, here in the cabin."

"With all them curtains up! Lawse! How can a man see to steer a night like this, with them curtains up? Gracious! He's steerin' like a runaway mule-wagon! We-e-e!"

The boat was tipping first one way, then the other.

"I bet I know what's the matter!" Wattics grinned in a low voice. "I bet he wants to be introduced!"

The three sportsmen chuckled and the girl nodded her head, smiling. It was perfectly natural that the one condemned to steer the boat while a lady in distress—a very pretty lady—was being entertained by his three comrades, should devise a means of compelling attention.

With some obvious reluctance, Wattics moved aft to relieve Doldrum at the wheel so he could hear the lady's story. He opened the cabin door and stepped into the cockpit.

"Better go inside, Doldrum," he said, in a voice to be heard above the engine, "I'll take the —— Hey! Fellers! He ain't here. Doldrum's gone!"

He stood there in the light of the cabin, staring thunderstruck at the vacant wheel. The other two men came rushing aft and crowded behind him in the narrow aisle between the staterooms.

"That's so. He is gone! Where on earth!"

"You numskulls!" the girl yelled behind them, "grab that wheel! Shut off the engine. Lawd a-mercy!"

She sprang to the cabin-wheel herself, peered out into the gloom ahead, her eyes blinded by the glare of the cabin-lights, but just then the search-light revealed a caving bank straight ahead, and the boat shot at it—but only for an instant. With a quick turn of the wheel, she put it hard down, and the boat turned from the bank, leaning far over.

"She handles nice!" she muttered to herself, and then aloud, in sharp command: "Put out the lights there! Put 'em out!"

An instant later the lights on board all went out, and the girl, throwing open the windows before her, strained her eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness. Far along the river she spied a Government light, and way astern was another one. Getting in line between them she held the launch, while she leaned out the windows to get the lay of the banks and the flow of the current.

"Lawse!" she exclaimed. "We're headed up-stream!"

From behind her she heard an excited conversation:

"Where'd he go? When'd you see him last? What on earth! Goodness gracious! I declare! What do you suppose! I can't imagine!"

"Say, gentlemen!" she remarked dryly, "I 'low I'd hire somebody to swear fo' me, if I couldn't do no better'n that!"

"Eh—what?" came in confused embarrassment from the cabin behind her.

"I reckon we'd better drap up into the eddy under that sand-bar an' git things untwisted. I declare! If we'd ever hit that cavin' bank we'd be'n sunk under! One of you git aft, an' when I holler, you stop that engine. Git now!"

There was a scramble, muffled bumps and exclamations, and then one of the men groped his way to the engine. He struck a match so he could see the throttle, and two minutes later, when they ran into the eddy, she called:

"Slow down! Now git forward there an' get the anchor ready to heave oveh!"

A man crawled through one of the open

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windows, and a minute later he said, in a subdued voice:

"All ready!"

"Stop 'er!"

For a moment the launch glided through the quiet waters, and the girl turned the search-light on the bar, a hundred yards inshore. When the boat came within forty yards of the bank, she ordered:

"Now heave 'er!"

There was a sharp splash, and the noise of dragging rope over the gunwale.

"Got bottom?" she demanded.

"Yessum!"

"Well, let 'er pay out there! Hold fast! Now tie it. Hit's always best to tie the anchor-line to the boat, gen'lemen!"

She sniffed, and three faces flushed, unseen in the darkness. She reset her back comb, then remarked:

"Better turn on them lights again theh!"

ALL four blinked a few times, then the girl's dark eyes roved from face to face of the three men, who rolled their eyes from side to side under the curious, amused and wondering scrutiny.

"Gentlemen!" she remarked after her embarrassing gaze, "you shore are the most plumb amusin' men I eveh did see runnin' loose on this yere old Mississipp' an' I seen lots and lots of 'em, too!"

The way she said it, it was almost a compliment from the heart. If they had been men happy in any kind of eminence or superiority, they could have felt proud, but they did not. They shuffled and wriggled and wet their lips.

"Yessum!" Calliper said after a long pause.

At that, they all burst into a laugh, and the girl's merriment led them all.

"Oh, law!" she cried at last, "if this yere ain't the plumb ridiculousest thing!" Then, with sudden thought, she sobered instantly. "Gentlemen! Where do you suppose my maw is? Who stoled her shanty-boat?"

They all sat down and looked at one another.

"And what became of Doldrum?" Wattics added. "I can't—I can't get used to this old river! Things happen so!"

"They do, for a fact!" the girl assented. "The last time I lost maw was at Helena. She got tore loose in Helena into a cyclone! Lawse! Hit were a week before I found her, down to Friar's Point!"

"Gracious!" Calliper exclaimed.

"Dear me suz!" the girl remarked with equal gravity. Wattics started to laugh, but on a glance from her, he thought better of it.

She was sitting at the head of the folding-leaf table, in a comfortable cane chair. Wattics was at the foot of the table, in a little dining-chair. Calliper was on the right side, Coaner on the left. The three were gazing at her uncertainly, and she was surveying them with calm, direct, almost puzzled looks, which were anything but composing. A little scowl of anxiety creased the broad expanse of her smooth forehead.

"Who all mout you be, anyhow, gen'lemen?" she asked at last. "How come hit you're down yere on the Old Mississipp'?"

"Why, we thought we'd like to travel. We came through the Erie Canal, to Lake Erie, then to Chicago and down the Illinois to the Mississippi, and here we are!"

"Two-three thousand miles an' nobody hindered you? Nobody stoled your boat? Ain't be'n aground, er busted up?"

"Well—er—yes. We've been aground!"

"I heard say a feller stoled your boat to Tiptonville."

"Yessum. We were at Reelfoot——"

"Gen'lemen, you must be mighty good fellers, er God'd punished your ignorance, yessir. He shore would!"

The three men puzzled over the remark in silence.

"Who's that feller Doldrum?"

"Why, he used to deal in automobiles, but kind of neglected his business, he liked the river so well. We met him at New Madrid——"

"New Madrid? Um-m. What kind of a looking feller was he?"

"Why, a little man, smooth-shaven, but reddish whiskers. He has awful big hands. He's a great joker—he'd make a fortune picking pockets, he does it so slick!"

"Um-m. Doldrum—Doldrum! I never heard that name before, but that description sounds powerful familiar, gen'lemen."

"Perhaps you know him——"

"Like's not. Well, gen'lemen, hit's after eleven o'clock!"

"That's so! I beg your pardon——"

"Huh! What for?"

The men were confused, but Calliper said:

"You'd better take that stateroom on your right, by the door. It's the one Doldrum had. The light's on the right of the door!"

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"Thank you, suh! Good night! To-morrow we scour this old Mississipp' from Hetecs to Memphis!"

"You bet we will! Good night!"

SHE went to the little stateroom, and the three men sat for a time, gazing from one to the other. There was nothing particular they could say, or wanted to say, but they had a lot of thinking to do.

When she was in the stateroom, the girl admired its neatness, cleanliness and fittings. The counterpane was white as could be, and there were clean towels, washbowl, clean sheets—everything that could be desired. She stooped, after the first glance around, to look under the bunk, and what she saw caused her to smother an exclamation.

"Land alive!" she whispered, drawing out four or five revolvers. She drew out another bunch of the weapons, and in a few minutes she had more than a hundred revolvers, single and double-barreled derringers, automatics, hammerless and hammer, bulldogs, police, army, navy—all the kinds of pocket firearms that she had ever heard of. Some were nickel-plated, some blue-barreled, some brown. Some were new and some were old and rusty. She examined a dozen or two, and found every one of them loaded.

"For the land sakes!" she whispered. "Ain't those fellers real gen'lemen! They 'lowed I might feel worried yere, and they let me have this yere room with all them guns! Sho! Now what do them fellers want of all them guns? My lan'! They must think we river-folks is real desprit, an' 'lowed if they got shot-up, they'd do some shootin' themselves."

Sitting on the little chair, she looked over the weapons with the pleasure and appreciation of an expert.

"They's shore real gen'lemen!" she repeated, "but shucks! Ain't they innocent!"

CHAPTER X

MR. BAIN IS CARELESS WITH THE TRUTH

STEVE BAIN hunted faithfully that morning, trying to get a coon for old Mrs. Quallam. He was carrying a carbine .25-20 rifle, and when he tried it, it shot beautifully. Only he could see nothing to shoot. The roaring wind seemed to have driven even the squirrels to cover. He worked over to the levee, and then over the levee into the woods behind, but all in vain. No game was in sight.

Finally he struck back over the levee and through the woods to the river-bank and, tramping down the bank, he was peering into the eddies, hoping to get a shot at a duck or a wild goose—and luck suddenly favored him with an avalanche.

In one of the eddy edges was a sand-bar, sheltered from the driving dry gale, and on the sand-bar were a dozen great wild geese. The geese were half asleep, squatted on the sand, and their eyes closed, except for the watchman. He sat up with his eyes wide open, and his ears straining to catch any suspicious sound. His back was toward Bain as he peered over the edge of the bank, screened by some greenbrier.

Bain threw up his rifle, caught the bead on the back of the watchman and broke him down. Then, as the other geese started up, shaking their heads, he drove the bullets into them—one-two-three-four, and as they took wing, paddling in the water, he dropped two more. There were seven dead geese, and two of them were floating in the current, a few yards out.

HE RAN down the bank, hoping the wind would drive them in and, a hundred yards down, he raced out into full view of the launch *Moonshine*, moored in a narrow eddy, where it had been driven in by the wind.

"Why, hello, Steve Bain!" a woman's voice rang out, "I'll get them geese for ye!"

And, sure enough, Lillian Lotus Quallam tossed a grapple from the launch, and dragged the fine birds in.

"Lawse! I didn't reckon to see you hyar!" Steve exclaimed.

"No more'd I expect to see you. Come down the levee?"

"Yassum. I got some more geese up yere, Miss Lillian. I'll go get 'em!"

"All right. Come back pretty quick. Dinner's most ready! Lawd!" in a whisper, "I'm plumb glad to see a real river-man!"

Steve grinned and went up the bank, where he picked up his five geese, and came lugging them down, a few minutes later.

"I plugged 'em center every time!" Steve remarked with pride. The girl picked up the geese one by one, and looked them over.

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Out of the cabin came Wattics, who also looked the geese over with interest and admiration. Steve glanced at him apprehensively at first, and then, seeing no sign that Wattics recognized him, he described the shooting of the geese. As he praised the rifle, the girl glanced at it, and then started almost imperceptibly. She excused herself a minute later, and went into the cabin. When she came out, she walked up to Steve, then, in a flash, drew a long .44 on his breast.

"Steve Bain!" she said hoarsely, "where'd you git my carbine? Where's my maw an' where's my boat?"

"Land sakes!" he exclaimed, dropping the carbine and staggering back, "I plumb fo'got hit was yourn!"

"You stoled that boat. You done any meanness?" she demanded with cold anger.

"No'm! No'm!" he shivered, his hands in mid air, "I—I——"

But words failed him.

"Git a rope, Mr. Wattics!" she ordered. "This yere's a river-rat, an' that's my gun!"

"Yes, ma'am!" Wattics exclaimed, and returned with a ball of trout-line.

"That's the stuff—you stick him up, an' I'll tie 'im!" she ordered. "You fellers always ties granny-knots! If they's any harm come to my maw, Steve Bain, we'll shore sink you in the riveh, yassuh!"

"Lawd!" groaned Bain, "I ain't done her no harm, Miss Lillian! I jes'—I jes'——"

Words failed him, however, when he thought of what he had done, and in his imagination he pictured the two women when they should get together and hear the truth. "Lawdy!" he thought, "two on 'em, an' both women!"

Lillian bound his wrists, and then tied him to a chair in the cabin. She sat facing him for a minute, glaring in his eyes, and he rolled his head from side to side, looking longingly out over the wide river.

"Oh, I got ye, Steve Bain!" she told him, "you needn't look into the river thataway. You'se gwine to tell me where my maw is, an' how come hit you got my carbine theh. Tell me now. You betteh speak!"

"Yassum—she 'lowed she'd go to Memphis!"

"What? She pulled out an' left me? Hol' on now!"

"Yassum. You see, she 'lowed you'd be all right to Hetecs Landin' to your friends——"

"She runned away, you say——"

"Yassum—you see, Miss Lillian——" he hesitated a moment as he searched his imagination, and in another moment he brightened up considerably. "You see, she knowed you'd be all right, an' she feared you all'd make a row, her gettin' married——"

"Maw married! You say she got married! Lawse——"

"Yassum, Capt. Collender——"

"That old store-boater? Sho! Maw married him? My lan'!"

"Yassum, he come down in his stern-wheeler, tied in to the soda-water boat an' took 'er right down to Memphis a-whooping!"

"But—but—" her suspicions awakening—"how'd you git my gun?"

"Why she seen me watchin' her 'n him, an' hit was the fust thing handy, an' she gin it to me, an' said I should pike down the levee an' not say nothin'. You see——"

"Don't that just beat the Dutch!" she cried, helplessly, "maw marryin' that old feller, an' me never s'pectin' nothin' at all. Lawse! Well, Steve, I'll untie you. You ain't to blame."

"No'm. You don't spose your maw'll be mad, me tellin' on her?" he asked, with some alarm.

"Shucks! If you hadn't told, I'd bored you chock full of holes. But I'll make that old Captain Collender think he's got a daughter-in-law as *is* one—him stealing my maw thataway!"

"Lawse! Yo' shore could make it hot fo' him, Miss Lillian!"

She laughed, shutting her teeth.

"Had yo' dinner?" she asked.

"No'm, I ain't et none senct I left Hetecs last evenin'."

"PO'R devil!" she remarked sympathetically. "Well, I'll have dinner on in a jiffy. Hit's be'n warmin' an' bakin' up bout long 'nough! Where you s'pose them other fellers is? My lan'! I hope they ain' gone an' got lost hyar in the Bottoms. I'm plumb anxious to git away an' see that new paw of mine. Lawse! If old women don't beat anythin', runnin' off jes' like little gals sixteen year old. You'd think they never had been married before! Why didn't she tell me! What she goin' to wear when she gits married, anyhow? She ain't got a dress to do hit in!"

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"She 'lowed she'd git one to Memphis," Steve suggested.

"I reckon that's what she'll do. Land sakes! Such doin's! Well, set up!"

There was a footstep on the stern gunwale, and in came Coaner.

"My!" he commented, "lucky thing I had my compass. I 'most got lost a dozen times. I wandered over to the levee three times, and I didn't know when I came to the river whether to go up or down. I thought I never would find the launch!"

"Where's Calliper?"

"I don't know. I haven't seen him since we separated chasing two squirrels!"

"Get 'em?" Bain asked.

"No, but I wounded the one I was after!"

The listeners all laughed, for hunters always say that.

They ate their dinner—beefsteak, fried potatoes, hot bread, sorghum and other things that the sportsmen and Doldrum had stocked in the larder.

"I got some geese," Bain volunteered, and Coaner left his meal to stare at the great birds on the bow deck.

"My!" he cried, "I'd like to kill a wild goose!"

"You'll see a lot of 'em on the river!" Bain told him.

"Bain's an old river-man," the girl remarked slyly. "He had a beautiful launch stolen from him once!"

Bain squirmed and his eyes popped.

"Is that so!" Wattics exclaimed. "You know, a man stole this launch the other day up to Tiptonville. Mr. Barkens—hotel-man there—he shot at him several times as he climbed the bank, after he swam ashore."

"He did?" Bain remarked, looking at the girl, who was demurely cutting her steak.

"Yes. How'd you happen to lose yours?"

"I was plumb neglectful!" Bain remarked. "I left hit into an eddy, and a feller, er gang of fellers, took hit."

"That's too bad!"

"Yessir! I be'n rubbing the bank eveh senct."

"Say, Steve, you didn't see anything of a man to Hetecs named Doldrum did you?" the girl asked.

"No. Why?"

"Why, he was on this launch, and now he's missing. Cayn't find him on board. Mr. Calliper ought to be coming back pretty soon. I'm afraid he'll be lost too!"

"Perhaps we'd better go look for him?" Wattics suggested.

"I guess you had. Steve, will you take these gentlemen looking for that fellow Calliper?"

"Yassum."

The two sportsmen got out their guns, and Steve waited while they fussed around, putting on their leggings, their shooting-coats, their shooting-caps and filling their pockets with shells of various sizes.

"Better take that rifle, Steve," the girl suggested, seeing that the river-man was diffident about it.

"Thankee, ma'am. I didn't know it was yourn!"

"That's all right. Ma's awful free-handed thataway. I be'n wanting a new one—a .25-35—hit holds up better on long range. For geese you know."

"Yassum. The .25-35's a mighty good caliber."

"LAND alive! What's that?" the girl cried, as there was a heavy thump on the stern, and a man came staggering into the cabin.

It was Calliper, hatless, his coat open, his eyes staring and his hat gone.

"Mercy!" he gasped. "Mercy! What a country!"

"Why, what's the matter? Been lost? We were just going to go out and look for you."

"Lost? No—not very bad, but there's a crazy old woman over there in the woods in a house-boat on a cove. She took my gun and held me up. But it wasn't loaded. I ran away. We better get right away from here. She's awful' crazy!"

The party gathered around with real interest to listen to the man's story. He had been hunting, and came to a cove or stream of water. An old woman had invited him to come on board, and had asked to see his shotgun. The minute she got it, she aimed it at him, and said she would make a prisoner of him, and keep him till her daughter came back. But, luckily for him, he had formed the habit of never carrying a loaded gun on board a boat, so the gun she aimed at him was unloaded. He dashed off the boat, up the bank and into the woods, and straight to the launch.

"We better get right out of here! She's such a crazy old woman!" Calliper exclaimed.

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"Might's well!" the girl assented. "I wanter get to Memphis. My ma's went an' eloped with a feller! Steve here happened to know all about it. You'd jes' soon drap down with us, Steve, hadn't you? You ain't no place to stay?"

"Yessum."

"We need somebody knows the river abo'rd, Steve! Who you reckon that old woman was, holdin' up Mr. Calliper thataway?"

"I couldn't say. I neveh hearn of that kind," Steve answered, rolling his eyes uncertainly. "Some women gits powerful lonesome down yere on the riveh, if they ain't used to hit!"

"Yes, I reckon she's jes' lonesome crazy. Well, the wind's laid an' we better pull out. He'p 'em with the boat, Steve, an' I'll get Mr. Calliper somethin' het up fer dinner. Hit's powerful wearin' on the nerves, gittin' stuck up with a gun thataway!"

"My! I was so surprised, I didn't know what to do, till I remembered the gun wasn't loaded. I heard her snap the triggers as I come through the door."

"What kind of a boat was it?"

"My! I didn't have time to notice!"

Steve saw that the ropes were coiled up, the gangplank taken in, the engine in working order. Then he went to the wheel. When they were out in the current, the waves rolled high, but the wind had gone down considerably. Wattics and Coaner stood on either side of Steve as he drove down the channel. He pointed out Forked Deer Island and the chute and the great bend. They told him of the attempt to steal their boat, and how cleverly Mr. Doldrum had thwarted the thief by plugging the carbureter.

At that Steve exploded:

"That's what! Wa'n't that a reg'lar Yankee trick! Ho law!"

He recovered himself in a moment, and stood for a long time apparently listening, but mumbling to himself. He had learned a new trick, and besides he was wondering what the old lady up in the bayou would think when he did not return in time for dinner!

"Ain' I lucky I hearn Cap'n Collender was goin' down to the Lower River!" he thought to himself. "He'll leave Memphis this evenin' an' we'll chase cla'r down to Red River. Sho! I ain' made such a plumb comfy trip senct I stoled that shanty-boat up to Evansville!"

CHAPTER XI

MRS. QUALLAM FLAXES ROUND

DOLDRUM, listening to Mrs. Quallam in the soda-fountain cabin of her boat, heard her give a squeal and then a yell of "Halt!" He heard the prisoner spring out the cabin-door and up the cypress log, and he half rose from his chair, expecting to hear shots. Instead he heard the two clicks as the gun-hammers fell on empty shell-chambers. He glimpsed Calliper's long, lean form sailing over the bayou-bank, out of sight into the brake.

"Sho!" he whispered to himself, "that feller is shore learnin' riveh-sense! He knowed that gun wa'n't loaded. Hue-e-e!"

Mrs. Quallam came storming aft, rearing about the empty shotgun and lamenting the escape of her daughter's husband, as she called him.

"Great guzzard!" she cried. "Ain't I an ole numskull! I mout of knowed that gun wa'n't loaded, the way he handed it over! If I'd on'y had my gun. Lawse! Of all the tarnation luck!"

"I thought of takin' a pop at 'im as he clumb the bank!" Doldrum remarked sympathetically, "but you know a feller don' like to mux in on anybody else's business."

"Well, I reckon hit's jes' as well you didn't. You see, I could a pled se'f-defense, but they wa'n't no excuse fer you. We'd had to sunk 'im in the riveh, er in the bayou. Sho! I neveh did kill nobody, an' I reckon I'm too old to begin now. But dod-rat that feller, marryin' my darter! I bet he'll recklect his fust meetin' with his mother-in-law!"

Exasperated as she was, she had to chuckle, and Doldrum laughed aloud.

"Lawse!" he said, "he never touched that cypress landin' but twict, and he tromped a hole in the top of the bank four inches deep, when he hit the level an' stretched out fer home!"

"Now don't that beat all! That feller lied to Steve! He said he war goin' to Memphis, an' hyar he is in Forked Deer Brake. What you make of that?"

"Mebbe they changed their minds!"

"Change their grandmothers! They jes' fooled Steve Bain, that's what they done!

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Drawed the fog oveh hisn's eyes. They's sportin' down this ole Mississipp', they is. Good land alive! I ain't basted that coon! Don' that beat all? I'd orter be'n bastin' him. Well, of all things! I ain't got that coon in the oven yit! An' hyar I be'n sufferin' fer coon all the Fall! Lan' sakes! I don' know what is comin' oveh me. I cayn't remember nothin'! I keep lickin' the calf over and over ag'in, an' ag'in I fergets to bait my hooks! Well, I s'pose I ain't so young's I used ter was. Lawse! But this yere coon's a dandy! He's good an' cold, an' if dinner is late, hit'll be good in proportion, yassuh! Sage an' onion dressin', rolled crackers an' bacon-drippin's, a pinch o' Cayenne pepper an' half a spoonful of black pepper, two spoonfuls of salt an'—lawse! If I cayn't layway a man, I ain' fergot how to roast a coon! When I fergits how to cook, I'll be ready to drap ove'board! Now I gotter mix some hot-bread. You like Illinois biscuits er plain sody-biscuits bes', Billy Okal-Goodberry-Doldrum-what's-yer-name?"

"Why, Mrs. Quallam, I'd trust to your jedgment on cookin'!"

"Sho! You riveh-fellers is always soft-soapin'! Well, I'd ruther have plain sody-biscuits. I never did cyar for them Illinois grease top-biscuits. Now, sez I, I gotter hump myse'f."

Doldrum watched the bank uneasily, and he picked up the double-barreled shotgun that stood in the corner, to make certain that it was loaded. It would be no joke to have Steve Bain come on board, carrying a handy little carbine-rifle, with himself sitting there unarmed. Steve would surely recognize him, and even the presence of a lady would hardly prevent him from beginning active hostilities, if he had the advantage.

BUT as the hours passed away, Steve did not return to the boat. The smell of the roasting coon filled the cabin-boat, and the old lady flaxed around and around, getting things into good condition for dinner. She set the table and dished out a hunk of jelly-like apple-butter. She beat up flour and condensed cream and water for milk-gravy. She basted the coon with a long spoon, mumbling and muttering the incantations which good cooks say when they are very busy and have an unusually fine meal in the making.

She watched the clock, and sent Doldrum up the bank to get a good dry chunk of willow.

Doldrum took the shotgun with him—"to shoot a squirrel," he said. But he was glad that one barrel was loaded with buckshot. He brought back the armful of willow, and the hot fire that flamed up put the finishing brown over the outside of the coon.

When she had forked it out on a goose-platter three feet long, she began to wonder if she had forgotten the salt, or the pepper, or the sage, and she was sure she hadn't turned it quite often enough. Doldrum, man-fashion, bore her doubts and questionings and fears with inward rebellion, but open assurance that he guessed it was all right. The table was all ready, the Missouri sweet potatoes steaming in their dish, the hot biscuits, nearly three inches thick, steaming three at a time beside the plates, the others keeping hot in the oven; and the river-woman was holding her chin as she surveyed the table, to see if she had forgotten anything.

"Well," she admitted, "it's all set except the gravy, and that's comin' to a b'il in the drippin'-pan, an' the coffee's all ready. Phew! Now I wonder where that tarnation Steve Bain is! I told him if he didn't come back in time, he'd go hungry tell supper! But I s'pose he got atter somethin' er other. Well, let's set up and eat, Mr. Forty-Seven-Names. My lan'! I plumb fergot to put on the drinkin'-water. Well, if you want a drink, you can h'ist the bucket into the river. I'm too darned tired to wriggle!"

She sat passively, breathing deeply as Doldrum drew the carving knife through the dark meat, and spooned a sweet potato, a slab of apple-butter, dressing and a slice of meat on the top plate. She broke a biscuit in three and helped herself to a ladle of gravy, watching with approval the avidity with which Doldrum helped himself, having set Steve Bain's plate to one side.

"I bet my gal's man never had no better set-up than this!" she remarked, as she began to eat. "You know, lots of them folks lives up the banks hain't no idea what it is to enj'y theirselves. I had one of them sassiety women ask me onct if I didn't suffer a great deal on the river! Wa'n't that all-get-out! Well, every critter to his own chankin's, as my old man used to say. I'm satisfied with what the Lord gives me!"

When they had eaten, Doldrum helped

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clear up the table, in spite of the woman's protests, and he insisted on wiping the dishes. She put what was left of the coon and hot-bread and sweet potatoes into the warmer, remarking:

"I expect Steve'll be hongry as a dog when he gits back. Hyar 'tis most three o'clock! Hit won't be so good. But I expect hit'll be eatable. Lawse!"

When the wind began to go down, she grew more and more restless. She looked at the sky, went up to the top of the bank and finally told Doldrum to go see if he couldn't find Steve, or some trace of him. Taking the shotgun and a fistful of cartridges, he circled back to the levee, then crossed over to the river and came down the top of the bank. His eyes ranged from the flocks of geese and ducks in the sky to the tracks in the soft ground underfoot, and the surface of the river fifteen feet down the crumbling bank.

His eye caught a yellow glint among the fallen leaves, and he found a .25-20 shell. There were several other empty shells of the same kind there underfoot, and when he looked around to see at what the cartridges had been emptied, he observed the sand-bar and the goose- and man-tracks on its smooth surface. There were reddish stains, too, and some feathers.

"He shore killed some birds theh!" Doldrum remarked to himself. "Some shanty-boater, like's not!"

He looked carefully at the man-tracks, but was uncertain as to the kind they were. But a little farther down-stream he came to an eddy where the bank was well tracked up, and here were the sharp-toed, trim-outlined tracks that meant sportsmen. A film of grease shining on the water and the sharp bow-nosings in the muddy sand showed that a launch had been tied in there, and that very recently.

He studied the tracks and signs a long while, as river-men with plenty of time do. He saw where the bleeding geese had dripped, and he noted the many footprints. He observed that one man had leaped from the top of the bank and slid three feet down the slope, then made another jump, and finally cleared the bank altogether.

"That feller was jes' a climbin'!" he muttered to himself, and then, with sudden revelation, he cried, "Why, that's that *Moonshine!* Lawse! Calliper hadn't quit runnin' when he got yere. Theh's a lady's shoe, too; Lillian Lotus's as I'm a sinner! Um-m. The wind drove 'em in yere, an' that's how come hit Calliper stumbled into the old lady's shanty-boat! Lawse! Ain't she rearin' about her gal! I bet that was Steve Bain killed them geese. Them feller's hadn't no .25-20, an' Steve had Lillian's rifle, by thunder! That's jes' what happened. I wonder what Steve told Lillian? Well, if he don' come back, the old lady'll let me he'p float her boat down, I bet! I'm gwine to tell her Steve's stoled that little rifle. That'll make her mad, an' mebbe I kin git to Memphis. Um-m. That's jes' what I'll do, an' if he ain't stoled the gun, when he comes back—hue-e-e! I don' wanter meet that feller with my back to 'im. He'd jes' soon shoot a feller as look at him, Steve would. I neveh did b'lieve in killin' anybody 'thout you had to. Well, I'll go give the old lady a song an' dance!"

HE CONTINUED down the river-bank till he reached the bayou, then walked up to the cabin-boat, and aboard. There he gave Mrs. Quallam a faithful account of the things that he had seen in the soft river-bank ground, including the girl's footprints.

"Don't that beat all-get-out!" she exclaimed. "That's what that gal wanted to Hetecs! She 'lowed I'd betteh stay abo'rd an' watch the bo't. Great guzzard! An' she sent that Steve Bain oveh to git her rifle! Wa'n't I an old ninny, lettin' him git hit thataway. She always did set a store by that rifle. Well, great land of Goshen, if I ain't all which-ways. The wind's laid. You'n me'll pull out'n this, an' I'll chase them folks cla'r to N'Orleans, dod-rat 'em. Loosen up them lines. Shove off, an' we'll float to-night. Hit'll be good floatin'. The water's fallin', an' hits good weather. Think o' that gal o' mine 'lopin' thataway! Good lan'! Gals gits sech trapsin' no 'count notions in their haids nowadays yo' cayn't trust 'em nowheres at all! Ketch that sweep, Mr. Man! If you kin pull a better oar nor I can, old's I be, you's a better man than mos', I'll tell ye that!"

They rowed the boat down the bayou and out into the current. It was nearly sundown, and there was not a gust left, from the gale that had been blowing all the midday, to raise a wrinkle on the surface of the gleaming yellow river.

The woman remarked that they'd better

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make the bend, instead of trying to cut through the chute of Forked Deer, to which Doldrum nodded assent.

"Makin' that chute costs time!" he said. "They ain't no current to the foot of it, an' you got to pull your lights out on the oars!"

"That's so. Well, you keep 'er stiddy, an' I'll git supper."

He sat down on a chair on the bow of the boat, with a foot resting on the oar-post, leaning back against the cabin. The boat was floating broadside to the current, swinging lazily, like the bar of a compass, back and forth. There were a few white clouds in the sky, and along the river to the west were the woods, whose trees came to the brink of the bank. Perched in the top branches of a tree was a hawk, waiting for a flock of blue jays or robins to fly out over the river where they would be unable to escape. Against the golden cloud where the sun was shining flew a flock of geese, and the gleam of the light outlined them with flickering fire, from bill-tips to the ends of their flashing wings—from the old leader to the tired gosling lagging at the end of the long V bar.

Turning his head, he could see the snag-dotted Forked Deer sand-bar, the purple willows and the grim woods. In the foreground was the heaving, coiling, undulating, bright yellow waters, with here and there a sodden leaf turning and diving in and out of sight. If marching down the levee had stirred his enthusiasm and quickened his steps, floating in mid-Mississippi smoothed the frown of apprehension from his forehead, softened the set of his jaw and relaxed the pose of his little figure.

Now and then he chuckled softly, partly from exhilaration, partly from sheer contentment. Once around the bend he swept the banks far and near with his gaze, and scrutinized a little white shanty-boat in the eddy, down at the point—Jim Caeley's boat, he knew, for that was Jim's bend, where he had fished for nine years. Jim must have a lot of money buried or hidden somewhere—and he knew how to take care of it, too!

Inside, Mrs. Quallam was flaxing around getting ready for supper. The noise turned Doldrum's thoughts to wondering what Steve Bain had told the sports. He wondered, too, what Steve's plans were.

"Steve neveh killed nobody to amount to anything," Doldrum muttered, "but he's mighty slick losin' fellers from their la'nches. Yassuh, I expaict that's Steve's la'nch now—as good as hisn!"

CHAPTER XII

CALLIPER CAYN'T PULL LOOSE, NOHOW

THE girl found a comfortable seat in the stern of the launch, leaning her back and head against the cabin, where she could look back up the river. Calliper sat down, opposite her and facing her. From time to time his glance followed her gaze, far up the gleaming river and its wonderland of sand-bar, island, wilderness, high-flying migrants and the awesome current, whose grandeur was heightened by the swell and wake of the launch.

He could look at the girl, stare at her, without offense. Her mind was, seemingly, at rest. Once in a while she sighed, her bosom heaving. Her profile was firm, her lips were rich in color and curve, her nostrils broad, her eyes dark, her lashes long, her forehead beautiful. Calliper gazed at her with increasing interest and wonder.

He had never seen a girl like her before. Her skin was smooth, and though ten thousand river-winds must have driven against those cheeks, there was not a wrinkle nor a blemish on them, though three tiny lines in the corners of her eyes told of the sun's glare across the water, and, doubtless, of experience in looking the world fearlessly in the eye.

For months Calliper had been traveling. He had been around the Great Lakes, watching fishermen and visiting the far places. For years and years his thought had been upon the lifework that he had been called to do—the ministry. With good heart he had studied, labored, given up his whole mind to the things that needed him. This year he had decided to give over to getting a perspective on the studies that he had made, so he had gone out into the open. For weeks and months he had seen no one except his two friends and the wayside people. Now he sat staring at the prettiest cabin-boat girl in the Mississippi Basin with emotions that astonished and subdued him.

He could not speak. He dared not venture to speak. He sat looking at her with an intensity and persistence that in some

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measure alarmed and troubled him. Resolutely he turned to look at the river, at the vast flood, but overwhelming wonder though it was, it drew his attention surely and irresistibly back to the countenance of the young woman who had never been out of sight of the river, who knew it with the intimacy of long association and experience and who would, unquestionably, be unable to endure any other mode of life, unless—unless—— On this word the young man dwelt in his thoughts.

Dimly, in the far background of his memory, an idea danced up to plague him. His mother, his sisters—the young women that he knew back home—were not like her. He could see them in his mind's eye—slender, filigreed, pretty girls, mostly blue-eyed, now that he thought of it, and tall. Some could play tennis and golf; some were parlor-ladies, and some were motor-car-girls. Nearly all that he knew would, on a Sunday morning, walk down the fine clean streets of Utica, with Bibles and lesson-papers and missionary-envelopes—gloved, precise, gentle, sweet, *good!* But this girl was good! She was strong, too, a great, strong, beautiful girl, who knew things all those other girls had never dreamed of knowing, who was experienced in the great school of life, who was brave amid dangers that might well make strong men quail.

It seemed to Calliper as though the Fates had contrived to bring him to the presence of this exotic, this strong and capable woman, for some purpose which he could interpret only in an uncertain and half-conscious way. If in his memory her voice boomed with unnatural weight and a trifle harshly, he excused it because he realized that to carry in a Mississippi River storm a voice must be heavy and deep.

How long he sat there he could not guess. It was while the last gusts of the dry gale blew themselves away, while the sun sank lower and lower out of the western sky. It was while the heave and rock of the storm waves subsided, and the wide surface flattened out, and became smooth and shining.

As the sun sank there came a change in the afternoon. One moment there was a balmy restfulness; the next a raw chill of apprehension and expectation. She sensed it as well as he did. She shivered and sprang to her feet.

"What you reckon my maw wanted to go marry that ole store-boater for, anyhow?" she exclaimed, "Don't that just beat all?"

"I can't imagine!" he answered, half unconsciously. "Is the river ever more beautiful than it has been this afternoon?"

"No!" she answered, her tone changing, "but I never did see Old Mississipp' when it wasn't—wasn't——"

"Incomprehensible and wonderful!"

"Yassuh. Hit holds anybody! When hit grips ye, you cayn't pull loose, nohow!"

SHE entered the cabin, and Calliper filled the lubrication-cups of the motor, which was running smoothly, with a sweet unobtrusive purring. When he followed her inside, she was at the wheel, with Wattics on one side, Coaner on the other, holding the course down the river like some daughter of Neptune. Steve Bain was at the oil-stove, making ready to get something to eat.

With a pang, a feeling of resentment, he heard her bandying words with the two men. He could not quite hear what about. He sat down where he could talk to Bain, and Bain told him a long story of how he had tied-in just above Fort Pillow, a few years before, when the whole face of the bluff caved in.

"I'd 'lowed to drap down right under the bluff next day," Steve said, "but, lawse! if I'd done that, I wouldn't be'n hyar to-day. Hit throwed a wave thirty foot high on the fur side the bank, an' they picked up two-hundred-pound cat-fish out there on the Bottoms. My shanty-boat was lifted right up and throwed on top a ten-foot-high bank, an' I had to dig a slide for hit, to git back into the water ag'in."

The incident fell flat on Calliper's thoughts, as did other things that Bain told about, as he cooked and baked and mixed, getting supper with the true versatility of a river-man. He was at home on any river-craft, on any island, towhead, sand-bar; in any town or wilderness.

"They've lit the Gov'ment lights!" the girl called back. "I expect we'd betteh light ourn!"

"I'll do it!" Calliper exclaimed, almost eagerly, and he soon had the side and mast lights burning. The little motor was started, so that they could have a light in the cabin. The girl came aft and took the other wheel, the curtains were drawn, and

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the cabin-door closed, so that the glow of the light would not interfere with the pilot's sight. Wattics followed, and when she was on the steersman's seat he threw a thick sweater over her shoulders.

"It's a raw night!" he remarked.

"Thank ye kindly!" she said softly, not turning her head. "I don't expect we can trip very far to-night. But I want to get to Memphis. I want to git there before them old folks pulls out. Lawse! I'm shore obliged to you gen'lemen, lettin' me go down thisaway with you-all! The steamboat don' come down tell day after to-morrow."

"We're only too glad of the chance to be of assistance to you!" Wattics answered with emphasis.

For a time they stared into the gloom in silence. She was alert, anxious, uneasy, as she turned the wheel over and back again. The responsibility of the night running was on her shoulders, and it was a dangerous night, with opacity mingled with false light. Over the surface of the river spread a faint mist in long undulations. No sooner had this appeared than she exclaimed:

"We cayn't do hit! We got to tie-in. We'll drop in below this sand-bar and anchor in the eddy there. Lawse! I'm plumb disapp'inted! But we mout hit a snag er ram the bank!"

The boat swung down the crossing, then she steered it up into the eddy under the point. She stopped the engine. Wattics went forward over the cabin and threw over the anchor. A minute later, the *Moonshine* was swinging lazily, stern up-stream, in the reverse current.

"What'd you stop for?" Coaner asked, opening the door.

"Hit's misting up right smart!" she told him. "Hit aren't safe, running down nights like this. I 'lowed we'd better drap in yere now. I've floated lots of nights, and we could float. But I don' reckon we'd betteh. They's men cuts loose an' goes to sleep floatin' all night in their shanty, but I never could!"

Wattics lighted the engine-pit and wiped off the fine piece of machinery work. It was a beautiful engine, and the girl sat down to watch him. He told her about the parts, the advantages and the disadvantages, the strength and the weakness of the motor.

"I should think you would have a motor on your boat," he suggested.

"I did reckon to, some time," she told him, "but I never had no chance to learn about engines, an' maw was always set ag'in 'em. She 'lowed they warn't safe. Her brother blowed up in one down Plaquemine way. She's be'n sot ag'in 'em eveh senct!"

"They're safe enough if you know about them. Why, you handled the throttles when we landed in!"

"Yes. I be'n on 'em some. But I ain't no hand to fix machinery! That's quite a trick!"

"It's about the best there is."

He tested the batteries, went over the bearings, tried the bolts for loose parts and burned his hand. He snatched it away with a sharp, wordless exclamation.

"Don' you fellers eveh swear?" she asked. "My lan'! Any man I eveh seen befo' would've tore the roof off. Ain' you got no salve er somethin' to put on yo' knuckles?"

He went into the cabin and got a First Aid wallet. She bathed his hand, then wrapped it with a bit of bandage.

"That fixes it all right!" he remarked, with just a shade of extra meaning in his tone.

"Shucks!" she exclaimed, with a toss of her head, adding with real sympathy, "there'll be a blister theh as big's a two-bit piece!"

"No matter!" he remarked, going on polishing the engine. "You've always been on the river?"

"ALWAYS. I was born on a shanty-boat in Arkansas Old Mouth. Maw come out of Rock River when she was nineteen years old. They nev' had be'n nowhere, she an' paw. They 'lowed to trip to St. Louis. They never had be'n thirty mile from home. They neveh went back, 'ceptin' to visit. I be'n theh—lawse! Of all the pent-up, shet-in, dusty an' suffocatin' places I eveh was in, you take one of them back towns on a crick yo' kin jump acrost! I cayn't see how folks stan's hit. They say some of them folks jes' stays theh in one place, Winter an' Summer! Sufferin' Moses! I'd die, shet in thataway. I expect you-all's used to travelin' aroun'?"

"Why, no, not very much. Never so far as this before. I lived in Utica all my life, except when I went away to college."

"You're eddicated! I knowed you was. An' them other two? Are they eddicated?"

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"Yes, both college-men—Princeton and Harvard. I'm a Cornell man."

"Sho! I knowed you were!"

"Why? How's that?"

"Beca'se—beca'se——" she hesitated.

"We tossed up, Coaner and I did—Calliper's a preacher and doesn't gamble—to see whether we should tour Europe or come down the Mississippi. I won. We started in September. We just wanted to rest up—get away from the work and things."

"Yes, I expect we-all's plumb amusin' to you-uns?"

"You seem like old friends, good friends, if that's what you mean."

"No——"

"Jabbah! Set up!" Steve interrupted them. "Roast goose an' hot-bread an' all them fixin's. Hue-e!"

They gathered around the table, with the girl at the head, toward the bow, Steve and Calliper at the foot, and the others on either side. There was an instant's hesitation, while Calliper asked a blessing.

A great young goose smoked on the table, and Wattics slashed it into brown chunks. He served it with dressing, and there was a great bowl of brown gravy. In a minute all were eating like famished river-men. It was a delicious meal, and the three sportsmen patted Steve on the shoulders.

"The best cook we've struck yet!" they cried and, after they had eaten and had all turned in to help with the dishes, except Miss Quallam, they leaned back in comfort, except for Steve, who wriggled uneasily in the glare of the light, under the eyes of all of them, especially under the amused scrutiny of the young woman.

"Steve, I reckon you-all ain' had much sech comfort as this, have you?" she asked him.

He glanced uneasily from one to another.

"I be'n in good bo'ts before," he answered boldly. "An' I be'n in po'r ones, too! Lan'! I come out'n the Ohio one time, in a Holston River canoe—eighteen foot long, two foot wide an' seven inch sides."

"Gracious!" Calliper exclaimed.

"How'd that happen?" Wattics asked.

"Why, you see, I'd be'n—I was—I—me'n another feller was 'fraid the Winter'd ketch us, an' so we picked up that canoe out'n a drift pile, an' whittled a couple paddles. Then we started. We come right down, night an' day, tell we got mos' to Memphis, an' theh we got a good skiff."

"Do boats cost much down here?" Coaner asked.

"Well, that depends," Steve answered judiciously. "Hit depends on who has 'em, an' how tight they hangs on to 'em!"

The girl laughed and, as the sportsmen looked toward her, doubtfully, she remarked:

"Steve'd call a log raft a good bo't!" she said. "I seen him droppin' down Arkansas River onct on two logs, settin' on a dead hog an' wearin' a stand-up collar!"

"That's so. I neveh will ferget that time!" Steve chuckled. "Them clothes belonged to a feller in a sawmill camp. He played a crooked game of cyards, he did, an' he'd got all my money. Then he got my coat an' shirt, an' I hadn't nothin' but my vest an' a pair of pants. Well, when I seen he was crooked, I cut through the side of hisn's tent one night, an' got all my money back, but he'd sold my clotes to ah nigger, so I took hisn. I hearn of him afterwards. He hadn't no clothes left, an' nobody'd let 'im have none, so he had to cut a suit out of bed-quilts! Lawse! I'd jest loved to seen that feller hitting up that road, in them fancy home-made clothes, luggin' a yeller suit-case, an' ev'rybody hollering as he stepped off! I wore that white collar more'n half the Winter, but hit ketched fiah when I hung hit up over the stove one night, an' I neveh did get to get anotheh one."

The listeners laughed, Calliper a little uneasily.

"What a strange sense of justice pervades the river atmosphere!" he mused.

"Does which?" Bain asked, starting up suspiciously.

"I was just wondering why you do not appeal to the law when some one wrongs you, that was all!" he explained.

The girl smiled almost pityingly.

"They ain' no law on the riveh—not that kind!" she remarked. "This yere is riveh-law!"

She drew a heavy automatic pistol from her bosom and held it out flat on her hand quickly. The three sportsmen straightened up, and Steve grinned with admiring appreciation.

"Do you—do you carry a pistol?" Calliper asked doubtfully.

"Suttin'ly. I guess if you fellers can carry a hundred an' seventy-two pistols an'

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guns, I kin carry one, cayn't I?" she bristled up.

"We carry revolvers!" the three exclaimed, Wattics adding gently, "I never carried a revolver in my life. Neither did they!"

SHE stared at them, frankly puzzled for a moment, then she stepped down to her cabin, and a minute later she returned with an armful of pocket firearms. She made trip after trip, and heaped the table full of them—all that miscellaneous assortment of weapons which she had discovered under the stateroom bunk.

"Goodness gracious!" Calliper cried at last, utterly amazed, while his two companions looked from gun to gun in open astonishment.

"I expect yo' gen'lemen don't know nothin' about 'em!" the girl remarked with sarcasm. "I neveh seen so many guns in all my born days to onct. Lawse! What did you-all expaict to do with all them? You cayn't shoot more'n two to a whack apiece!"

Even Steve, hardened river-rat that he was, straightened up at the display of weapons.

"Honest, Miss Quallam, I've never seen a single one of those guns before!" Wattics exclaimed, and the girl looked at him with scornful disbelief. But after a moment she laughed aloud, a merry, shaking laugh. "Ho law! You fellers shore had a pardner! Who you reckon that feller was, Steve?"

"I'm shore I don' know!" Steve grinned, then, suddenly changing the subject, "Did yo' gem'men eveh hunt coons with a fiahlight? This yere's a mighty likely night. Coons'll be using all over!"

"By George! I would like to have a coon-hunt!" Wattics and Coaner cried, and in twenty minutes the four men were climbing the bank in the mist, the "sports" wearing fancy headlights and Steve with a lantern on his head. An hour later Steve emerged from the brake, and hailed the boat.

"Hey thar!" he asked. "Them spo'ts come back yere?"

"I hain't hearn or seen 'em!"

"Well, dod-rat the luck! Them fellers is los' in the Dark Hole of the St. Francis Bottoms."

"My lan'!" the girl exclaimed, "wild geese gits lost theh!"

"An' tame ones!" Steve snapped. "Oh, well, cayn't find 'em to-night. No ust talkin'!"

Just then there was a mighty bump against the side of the launch, and when Steve and the girl ran out to find out what was the matter they saw a house-boat dimly outlined in the fog. The next moment a woman's voice rose from the cabin-boat:

"Of all the tarnation, dod-foolishest things—floatin' in a fog's the——"

"Good land!" Lillian exclaimed. "What's maw trippin' in the night fur?"

"Ouch!" groaned Steve.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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HARMATTAN

BY THOMAS SAMSON MILLER

CHAPTER I

AN AFRICAN SLAVER

"YOU are a fiend!" snapped Low—Job Low, the political agent who safeguarded the trading-company's interests in the African forests.

But Mohammed Boro took that for a compliment, cackling in his throat as he drew the hood of his burnoose over his head and tucked his sandaled feet under him, for the Harmattan wind blew cold and gritty off the Sudan. He spat his words through the mouth-fold of his turban, above which his pistachio-green eyes twinkled pure diabolism.

"He was ver' trusting, was zis m'sieu—what was his name? I am not acquaint' with white men's names—I can not say them correct."

"His name is, or, if your story of his disappearance is not a bunch of lies, *was* Charles Montgomery," snapped Low.

"Ah, yes; I recall eet now; Mong'mery. I say eet nicely, eh? Well, after the trouble with the Yergum cannibals he went down to the Montoil country. A-h, those Montoil! An arm's length of French cambric they demanded for ten eggs, seven of them bad. And they got ze longest-armed negro to measure by! I laugh me when I see zat." The rascal distorted his wicked face in a grin, and went on with relish. "Zen ze Magagi of Keffi demanded mos' 'spensive present, and—— But m'sieu knows how cleverly ze Africans separates the white traveler from his packs—m'sieu knows," he leered.

Low was restrained by the menace of the assagais of six ruffians at the slaver's back from taking him by his villainous throat.

He was in a desparate situation. Caution and self-control were necessary, if he was ever to see the Niger again.

Mohammed Boro was a name whispered by the blacks from the Congo to the Niger with awe; mothers quelled unruly children with it. "If you don't stop crying Mohammed Boro will come and eat you up," they would say. The slaver was the bogie of the Hinterlands, and the English and French alike had set a price on his wicked head. So Low went slow, tossing careless questions, hoping that in his boasting the man would drop some item that would furnish a clue to the complications in which he

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found himself completely enmeshed. He was acting on a simple order, which had reached him by runner while he was on the Upper Niger, commanding him to "get in touch with Charles Montgomery, if possible."

The Agent General had omitted, either through policy or for want of time, to say who this Montgomery was, what he was doing and why Low was to "get in touch" with him. With these meager yet emphatic instructions Low had struck across country for the frontier lands between French Sudan and British Nigeria, only to fall into the hands of Mohammed Boro and his cutthroat gang, as Montgomery had evidently done before him.

"I understand you, Boro. You or your agents sowed the trouble with the Yergum and Montoil. But what I can't understand is, why didn't Montgomery get word to the British Resident at Maifoni, who'd have sent a company of Housa soldiers to his aid?"

"A-h, but zis Mong'mery was not of the Resident's tribe, but was from far-off land called America. He had high words with the Resident, who called him a Yankee adventurer, which I know not what that is."

Low dissimulated his surprise at this information, though it added to the mysterious complications besetting him. What, he asked himself, was an American doing in the Sudan, and what was the British Company's interest in him? Did the Agent General mean, by his order to "get in touch" with Montgomery, to spy on him, trick him or aid him? Aloud, he commented on the excellence of Boro's spy system that told him what had happened between the American and the Resident, who evidently had been unfavorable to Montgomery. The slaver took the comment for compliment again, boasting:

"Oh, aye; we know mos' everything going on. We were ready for Mong'mery, and ready for you, eh?"

"Yes," Low grimly agreed. "I see now who circulated the stories among my Yoruba carriers about the ferocity of the Bushmen, so that they deserted me, and I guess it was your spies who incited the Bushmen to attack me and what few followers I had left, so you might make a spectacular rescue, and take me prisoner—for what object I can't think," said Low, hiding a strong suspicion that the slaver had hoped to play on his gratitude for rescue to secure some knowledge which he suspected Low withheld. He came bluntly at Mohammed Boro with a direct question:

"What is your game?"

"You ask. I laugh. What is ze game of zese lands? Me, I haf run slaves from the Congo, traded ze slaves for Bornu ivory, sold ze ivory for French guns and traded ze guns with emirs and sultans——"

He stopped suddenly, his green eyes very cunning.

"For what?" asked Low with affected nonchalance.

"I am not greedy, m'sieu; just for friendship with ze Lowan of Kowa I traded ze French carbines what you see on ze shoulders of ze palace-guards."

LOW glanced up the hut lane to the adobe palace of the Lowan, musing aloud, as he watched several negroes swaggering around with carbines. "If you are buying the friendship of this Lowan with French carbines, it seems to me you must be the agent of the *Société des Sultanats.*"

With his own question dawned a little illumination of the mystery. He was up against an old game, the intrigue of the powerful French Company against the British Company for the control of the caravan routes and trade of the Hinterlands. But what had the American to do with it? And why all this bother about this miserable little Lowan, ruler of a town of less than five thousand Kanembus? But again the boastful slaver had taken his remark for a compliment, sniggering answer:

"Yes, I am ze trusted agent of ze *Société des Sultanats.* Ze French Company know all 'bout Mong'mery—what he come for, which is more zan you know, eh?" said Boro.

Low met Boro's piercing look noncommittally, though the slaver had dealt a blow at his pride, for he felt bitterly the want of confidence, or the carelessness, of his superior in not giving him the inside data of Montgomery's mission. But Boro's next sentence gave him good cause for thankfulness for this very ignorance. The slaver leaned his thin, vicious face forward, hissing between closed teeth, "I have watched you, and I know you know nosing of zis game, which is good for you, for I haf a way of making stubborn men talk."

Low repressed a shudder and, looking the

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fellow calmly in the eyes, asked, "Is that why Montgomery disappeared? You said 'disappeared'!"

"Ah, you think I killed heem. No; I was holding him for what you might call sport," he hissed with sudden rage, the meaning of which was revealed in his next sentence. "He called me the mongrel mischance of a Kanuri slave and Tunisian Jew."

"Well, that's about the size of it," Low dangerously goaded.

Mohammed Boro leaped to his feet, and his words pinged like shot.

"Tak' care! By Allah! I haf no lofe for ze whites. As for zis Mong'mery, he disappeared. I left him safe in the village. The fool tried to escape. Well, what happened? What would happen if you tried to escape? If you go south you fall into the hands of those wild Buduma; if you go north the Yam Yam people get you and peg you down in a white-ants' heap, for zey say a man eats sweeter treated that way. That's what happened to Mong'mery."

"Sweet of you! But it would be unfortunate for you if he turned up alive. Those Americans are not like other whites. They have many lives. You can't kill them," said Low, teasing the fellow's superstitious nature. The shot evidently told, for a shade of anxiety crossed the slaver's face, only to disappear into a grin of assurance. He cackled in his throat.

"M'sieu speaks foolishly. I haf no fear; I haf ze blood of Tippó Tib in my veins." Thus did he boast descent from the cruelest of Arab slavers.

"Ah, that accounts for a tenth of the devil in you. And the rest comes from your Kanuri dam," scoffed Low.

"Take care! Take care! If I had not eaten cola-nut with you, I would have you spitted to the sands where you are."

"If you had not taken cola-nut with me I would not have indulged in such homely truths on your parentage," Low dryly responded, nonchalantly adding, "From which parent do you get your superstitious nature?"

Mohammed stiffened and his right hand clutched at his side dagger, while the left shook praying-beads in Low's face as he flung a hot denial of superstition.

"It is the law of the Faithful that one harms not one with whom he has partaken cola-nut. If you kill the man you have eaten cola-nut with, his spirit will haunt you. I am not superstitious, for I go this very night against the wizard in the mountain, who has come to Kowa since I was away, and is gaining much power with the Lowan. They say he has powerful ju-ju. But I am not superstitious—I will strip him of his ju-jus and charms and send him to work with the slaves on the Lowan's new palace. As for you, M'sieu Low, I leave you to the hospitality of Kowa, such as it is," he remarked, with a significance that Low quickly understood, for the instant he drew off with his ruffians the blacks crowded round to indulge the rare sport of baiting a white man, throwing filth and insults and reaching out to tear his clothes from him.

CHAPTER II

THE LOWAN OF KOWA

LOW bore the mauling fingers and vile breaths of the blacks with patience, knowing that the least sign of temper would be the signal for his quick finish. Yet his position was intolerable. He wanted to think, to weigh the chances of escape. But thought was out of the question, so long as he had to dodge the filth flung at him. He tried to shoo them off with grimaces, he even resorted to a desperate stratagem of forcing his left eyeball out, till it bulged hideously, in the hope that fear of the Evil Eye would scatter them. It did; but they were quickly back again.

Then he thought of the harmonica which had solaced many a lonely camp-fire. This simple little instrument, which has sung its way to the hearts of Australian "bush-whacker," Canadian trapper and California miner, and has acted orchestra to many a cowboy dance, and organ to many a rude mission, never had failed in its appeal to the simple Africans. In a moment he had his tormentors listening, first with fear of ju-ju, then with wonder, lastly with childish delight, until his lips were sore, when there came a half score of men in Sudan shirts and with carbines on their shoulders. But Low's surprise was most aroused by the officer, a dapper little brown fellow, whom he recognized from his red fez and khaki pants as an ex-soldier of the Housa constabulary. The little fellow swaggered along with a ten-inch cavalry sword laid naked over his shoulder. He addressed Low in Niger English:

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"I savvy you, Massa Low."

"And I savvy you, you rascal. When did you desert the Company?"

"Oh, a long time gone by. So many moons I can't count. I's de General of de Lowan's army. I's come to take you to de palace," he crowed.

"That suits my book exactly," said Low. "Lead on. So you've got guns?" he invited exchanges.

The Housa gossiped freely.

"Yes, we have guns. But these here bushmen can't shoot yet. Some day we are going to eat up the Resident at Maifoni, then we will go down to the Niger trading-stations and show the white man he ain't boss no more. Dis here Lowan is going to be plenty big Sultan—bigger than the Shehu of Kukawa. Then I will be big general," he crowed, and flung an order at his "army." "Step lively, you pagans, and hold up your heads. T'row out you chests and put de one leg 'fore de other like you was trying to get dere."

"You'll hang at Lokoja yet," Low grimly promised, and received a prod from the fellow's sword. He grinned, but swore vengeance beneath his breath, and walked head erect through the Lowan's courtyard into a semi-dark adobe hall, where he had to endure a long wait ere the Lowan deigned to appear.

SUDDENLY there was a swish of burnooses. In the dim light of a wall slit Low was agreeably surprised to see a rather pleasant-featured man instead of the cruel-looking despot he had expected. It was evident that the villain of the play was Mohammed Boro, who now stood beside the Lowan, his face for the first time uncovered, the vicious mouth and evil sallow skin as sinister as Satan himself. Low watched that face, its least flutter of expression, for the road to freedom was not a simple matter of escape, but one of subtlety and intrigue. So he waited for the Lowan to show his hand. The latter opened the palaver at once, the Housa General interpreting. It was evident from the Lowan's tone and gestures that he was angry, as he snarled:

"You come to spy out my country. It is always that way. First one white man comes, then the trader and then the white man's prophets, who preach against the ju-ju gods and maketh trouble until they are killed. Then the whites come with armies and eat us up."

Low replied that his Company merely sought peaceful trade. The Lowan shook his scepter at him, brawling:

"You lie. You come to set rule over us, collect hut-tax and set a Resident in my town. You will make me free my slaves. First you send a man to make a map of my country and use ju-ju instruments against me."

Low replied calmly that no one had made maps of the country, when, to his astonishment, the Lowan said he had proof.

"Produce it," cried Low.

The Lowan signed to a courtier, who brought a paper, every courtier holding his arm across his eye in fear of magic. Taking the paper with outward semblance of calm, conscious that the Lowan's big black eyes and the green slits of the slaver were intensely watching his face, Low unfolded it. With an effort of will he masked his surprise as he saw a rough sketch of the route from the Bennue tributary of the Niger to Kowa, with rough calculations of longitude and latitude.

But his surprise was nothing to his bewilderment when the courtier brought forth a theodolite. He looked up, surprising as much bewilderment on the face of the Lowan and Mohammed Boro. But theirs was of a different kind, as the slaver's next remark showed.

"This Mong'mery was making black magic against us."

"Not superstitious, eh?" teased Low, smiling.

Before the slaver could utter the hot words on his tongue, the Lowan burst out in passionate denunciation.

"It is a devil's instument," he snapped. "The whites have such magic. They tell the hour of the day by little machines, and their canoes go by fire. It is so. The wizard in the mountain told me, and he took away with him a magic instrument of the whites that reads the stars, that he might make ju-ju over it and destroy its power."

Low suddenly changed his defense into an attack:

"Take care, Lowan, or you'll have a British force shooting the thatches off your village, and you will find yourself in chains, if you play so freely with white men."

He had spoken with the idea of angering

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the Lowan to an indiscretion, but the result exceeded his most sanguine hopes.

"I am not afraid of British guns," the Lowan boasted. "The French whites are my friends. They will fight my battles."

"A-h. But the French have a treaty with my King, whereby they agree to look on this country as within the British sphere of influence," Low answered, without batting an eye. But the bluff did not work.

"Since when?" asked the slaver, and sneered: "Do the whites divide a country before they know anything about it?"

"The frontier is decided according to an astronomical line, to be further defined by an Anglo-French Commission," answered Low, and with his own answer came a sudden partial enlightenment as to Montgomery's mission. But he had no time to digest his discovery, for the Lowan's answer knocked him flat.

"That is old news. This frontier-commission landed at Old Calabar last moon. But what of that? The whites come from the north and the whites come from the south, and I have made treaty with the whites from the south, whose flag I acknowledge." Saying which he made a motion to a black, who suddenly produced the flag of the *Société des Sultanats*.

The slaver took advantage of Low's surprise to sneer:

"M'sieu comes to Kowa for information."

"If you are so well informed, why do you bring me here? What do you expect to learn from me?"

"We would like to know what Mong'mery was doing with those magic instruments. We know he is not an officer of your King's commission, for the Resident at Maifoni would have nothing to do with him."

Low was getting tired of this baiting and, seeing he was not likely to learn anything more, took a bold front, scolding the Lowan.

"You're playing a dangerous game. If you ask this Housa 'General' he will tell you that we whipped the French from the Niger, and that it went badly with those chiefs who had made treaty with them. I tell you again that you'll have British guns about your adobe palace before the new moon if you listen to the advice of a slaver on whose head there is a price. Think well, Lowan; one word from the British to their ally the Shehu of Kukawa will put ten thousand spearmen in the field against you. It's time you woke up and took a look at yourself."

The Lowan fiercely tugged his beard at that, and entered into a heated argument, in the dialect, with the slaver, which resulted in a sudden breaking up of the palaver.

BUT the threat told. An order was given the Housa, who turned to Low with a very different attitude from his insulting behavior of a moment before.

"If you will come with me, Massa Low, I will find you a hut and food, as the Lowan orders," said the rascal, taking Low to a hut at the market end, where he stayed to chat and help Low dispose of a calabash of mealies and honey which the Lowan sent. Low encouraged the fellow, for reasons of his own.

"So the slaver is afraid of the wizard's influence with the Lowan?" he pursued a remark of the Housa's.

"Yes. To-night we go with the gunmen to the wizard's hut."

"So?"

"It isn't 'so.' I can tell you it's a nasty job. I'm going with my men to kidnap him. He is getting too big-bellied around here."

"Your men!" laughed Low, and the little fellow took on a big swagger.

"They are ten to-day; next moon a hundred; bimeby five hundred—a thousand. And to-night we take the wizard," he repeated.

"Well."

"It is not 'well.' I don't like it."

"Afraid?"

The fellow toyed with his cavalry sword, then came out in true colors.

"I'm afraid of nothing. I got the Company's medal in the Bida war. But this wizard has powerful ju-ju, and my men have no powder," he innocently added. "We thought we had five cans, which we raided from the Arab merchant at M'boni. But when we opened the cases we found the wizard had made ju-ju against it and turned it into white man's evening drink."

"Ah! You mistook gunpowder tea. What a joke!"

"I no savvy 'joke.' The wizard made magic against the powder. He has powerful ju-ju; he will put an egg in his hand, say magic word, 'Presto!' and, lo, the egg is gone. He did it before the Lowan and all his court. The Lowan listens to his advice. That is why the slaver is going to cook his

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goose. The slaver is going to be big man one day, when the Lowan has built his new city, where the Budumas will bring their potash for market. The caravans will no more go to Kukawa, but will bring the ivory and rubber and the cloths of Kano to the Lowan's city. He will be the greatest lord within seven tribes. The city has a wall the width of five steps, the top is loopholed for gunmen and the plains about are trenched and cunningly pitted to trap the Shehu's horsemen and the white men's wheeled guns. And on the city wall there will be cannon. It is so. I lie not. By Allah, it is so! The slaver will get the cannon from his white friends of the south."

"Where is this city?" Low asked, dissimulating his intense interest under a show of idle concern.

"An hour's march north of the Wady. To-morrow you shall see, for to-morrow you shall surely go there with the slaves and tread the wet clay into the walls with your naked feet, side by side with pagans."

"You're a charming prophet! Why do you tell me all this?"

"I want charm against the wizard. The whites have powerful charms. Give me a charm against the wizard and I will speak a word for you to the whip-master on the walls of the new city."

"My friend," said Low, in his most impressive manner, "get it out of your head that I shall ever tread clay on the Lowan's walls. If you want that charm you've got to come through with real value. Answer a question or two. Did you see the white man, Charles Montgomery?"

"I saw him in the village. It was sundown. The niggers were plaguing him. I then went to the palace, where soon the slaver came and said the white man had gone. We look him an' look him an' look him an' no see him. But I have a piece of paper with signs."

"What do you mean?"

"We took it from his servant's nose—the black man—he thought to get away, but we speared him under the big baobab by the Montoil road."

"I will trade you a charm against the wizard for the paper."

"Good. Here it is." The soldier eagerly produced a cigarette paper folded so small that only the knowing eyes of an African would ever have discovered it up the runner's nostril.

Low smoothed the paper out on his palm. The message was written in shorthand. The signs were almost obliterated. Also it was now dark. But the Housa "General" brought a calabash of nut-oil with a grass wick and in its spluttering light Low slowly deciphered this message:

Stand firm for the Lowan of Kowa. Owing to Harmattan clouding stars unable to take positions. Lowan reported building city south; object unascertained. Agent *Société des Sultanats* on ground. I talked with Madame Joulaud off the Gold Coast.

The Housa impatiently broke in on Low's bewildered cogitations.

"Will you give me the charm against the wizard?"

"Eh?—oh! Your charm? Wait; let me think. Holy smoke! I have it. Shout this at the wizard—shout it: 'Aberdare.' Can you say that?—say it."

The Housa repeated the telegraphic address of the Company, and quickly took his departure, sure of his charm against the wizard!

CHAPTER III

THE MASKED WIZARD

LOW cast his eyes up to the mountain, which pierced the Harmattan sandstorm and bulked dimly against the stars, his opinion of Montgomery augmenting with his quick thinking. Something of the political situation at Kowa he now understood, though why the Lowan of this miserable little village should be the object of so much intrigue on the part of French and British was a mystery. And how came an American to be implicated in the matter? It was evident that the last part of the message, referring to Madame, was meant to convey a warning. But the startling possibility as to the identity of the wizard was becoming more than a plausibility. This supposed wizard, who turned up about the time of Montgomery's disappearance and was gaining such influence with the Lowan that the slaver was afraid for his own schemes, and who cunningly took away Montgomery's surveying instruments, supposedly to make ju-ju over them; who, above all, made eggs disappear from palm to sleeve like any stage magician was—— But why waste time idly speculating? If Montgomery could so miraculously disappear, why, so could he, Low!

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He looked about him. The village was quiet. Except for a few negroes squatting round supper-pots, the others were all gathered at the voluptuous tom-tom dance at the far end of the market-place. Evidently the order had gone forth that Low was to be unmolested, for not even a glance was thrown his way. He measured with his eye the distance to the high millet grain that bordered the village, and then luck favored him. Three loose goats were stealing for the millet.

Low hastily threw himself all fours among them, using them for cover as he crawled. He reached the millet without alarm, and ran doubling through the field, until he came out into scrub mimosa, where the darkness and the sand-storm shielded him as he sprinted to the mountain. But he could not locate the path to the wizard's retreat, though he knew it must be well-defined. He searched frantically, his ears cocked, for the coming of the kidnapping party. Meantime the slaver and his party might be actually on the trail, and if he reached the wizard first——

Low began a circumspect examination of the base. At this time the Harmattan that had shielded him began to thin away, until the mountain side stood out in its crags and crevices. Casting up his eyes Low suddenly saw a man-shape, clear against the stars as it bent to an instrument on a tripod. Like a goat he went up the steep side, until he came on a typical wizard's retreat, a clay hut festooned in human skulls. Then he saw the wizard himself, above him on a ledge in fantastic costume.

Without hesitation Low called to him:

"Montgomery; ho, Montgomery!"

The answer that rang down bridged a world of mystery.

"Great Scott! Who are you?"

"Quick! Come off that ledge. You're too good a target!" cried Low.

The warning was scarcely out of his mouth ere the figure was at his side and removing its mask. Low saw the silhouette of a sharp nose and determined chin, but had no time to remark more, being busy with explanations of the slaver's plot.

Montgomery caught him by the arm, dragging him to the mouth of a dark cave, against his resistance, and his objection that they would be holed like rats in a trap.

"They won't dare follow us in here," Montgomery significantly remarked, adding, "We're in the burial caves of the dead Kanembus chiefs for a hundred or more years. Keep close. One misstep and you are as hopelessly lost as in the catacombs of Paris. All right. This is far enough. Now—who are you and what brought you up here and how came you to hail me by name and who are you working for and a hundred other questions?"

This from one he had dared so much for riled Low to sharp reply.

"I'm Low, of the British Company, sent up here to get in touch with you."

"Great Scott! Do they think I'm of the stuff that gets itself lost like a babe-in-the-woods? Didn't they select me for this job because of my scouting work with Burnham in South Africa and my service with Kitchener in his Egyptian campaign? Why, they might have queered the whole game," Montgomery replied with heat.

"What game?" asked Low. "I'm entirely in the dark—acting solely on a curt order to get in touch with you."

"Ah! the Higher-Ups are careful not to commit themselves," said Montgomery.

"I don't know what you mean. I only know I followed your trail and fell into the slaver's trap, as you did."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Low," snapped the scout. "To fall into a trap and to *walk knowingly* into a trap are two very different matters!"

"Do you mean to try and work that gag on me—that you deliberately——"

"Walked into Mohammed Boro's trap!" Montgomery took him up. "Yes, I do mean it. When I discovered that he was the cause of all my trouble with the Magagi of Keffi and that it was his spies who caused my carriers to desert, I played the thing through—anything to get to Kowa, to which I was bound anyway!"

"So?" dryly. "But how about getting out again?" asked Low, feeling a little foolish, for there was something in the American's voice and bearing that dissipated any sense of boasting.

"I'll get out all right when I have accomplished what I got in for!" answered Montgomery, in unmistakable determination. Low growled a warning not to hallo before he was out of the woods, but that had little effect on the scout, whose answer forced from Low an ungrudging recognition of a kindred spirit in courage and resource.

"We'll be a surprise-party to this surprise-party of the slaver, Mr. Low. In dealing

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with Africans one has two valuable weapons in surprise and superstition. We'll play both, for I take it you are with me in this. Remember that these blacks will be almost paralytic with fright the moment they sight my hut, so when I jump among them their trigger-fingers will be useless, and you can count on 'em to get down the mountainside as fast as their legs 'll take 'em. That leaves us the slaver and this Housa 'General.' If we can secure Mohammed we'll be doing the best day's work for the Company you or any one else ever did, and we'll be in a position to pay off old scores. There's a risk, which I am more than willing to take if I can retrieve a bad break I made. Don't ask questions; sufficient that I let a certain Madame Joulaud tease important information from me on my journey out from England, and if I don't retrieve I shall be the joke of Africa, not to mention the London clubs, where I cut a dash once in a while."

"Ah," cried Low, "so the lady has gone back to the old trade. I thought her reformation wouldn't last. So she turned her velvety voice and trained her sentimental eyes and used that soft white little hand of hers to despoil you, eh?"

Montgomery rapped an oath into the cave's darkness, then, with that almost boyish shame of men whose lives are spent in the wilds, he revealed the old story of a susceptible young man and a seductive adventuress in twin deck-chairs under the soulful nights of the Bight of Benin.

"So there you are," he finished. "She got information entrusted to me on my honor, and with the help of a confederate sold me out to the *Société des Sultanats*, which has given me a —— of a lot of trouble. What was that? Good Lord? I heard a voice shout 'Aberdare'!"

"That's the Housa 'General,' using the charm-word," cried Low. "Quick, man; your scheme?"

"Is simplicity. We emerge from the caves suddenly. The blacks take us for spirits and fly. Mohammed Boro will make a stand, for it is imperative that he destroy me. But I'll attend to him. You go for that Housa. I want him. Come," he succinctly added, leading the way.

DARING as the scheme looked, its very success lay in that daring. Hurrying to the cave's mouth, they were able from its blackness to see the enemy without being seen. The dark silhouette of the negroes with their useless carbines showed about a dozen feet from the hut, while the slaver stood well forward, cursing the Housa for the noise he was making with his supposed charm-word.

"All ready!" whispered Montgomery. "Now! Give a yell and ——"

They leaped from the cave upon the ledge, Montgomery yelling for all he was worth, heading for the slaver, who in the surprise shot wildly, and was next moment borne to earth under what he confidently believed was a devil incarnate, so tenacious was the clutch on his throat.

Low's work was easier. The Housa's long sword got in the way of his legs as he tried to follow the blacks. Next moment it was wrenched from his grasp and Low was ordering him to go to the hut and behave himself. The ex-soldier went like a cowed dog.

Low ran to Montgomery's aid, throwing himself on the squirming form of the slaver, whose supple convolutions and knit strength made him no mean antagonist. A blow from the flat of the cavalry sword would have put an end to the struggle. But even as Low hesitated to deal the cowardly stroke the chance was lost. Both men rolled down the precipitous mountainside. Low scrambled after, as best he might, and came on Montgomery suspended like a sack across a mimosa-bush. He helped him to his legs. The slaver had disappeared. Montgomery spat blood as they painfully climbed back to the ledge, where the Housa sat with the fatalism of his race and creed.

"We mussed it," groaned Montgomery, spitting out two teeth.

"They'll be hot after us at daylight," said Low.

"I haven't chosen this retreat for nothing," snapped Montgomery, irritated at his miserable failure. "We are safer in the caves than in London. All over Africa you will find such places with a ju-ju reputation, where no black will dare venture. What's worrying me is the opportunity this slaver will make of this exposure with the Lowan."

"Why all this bother about this miserable little Lowan?"

Montgomery turned and stared, and then gasped out: "Is it possible you don't know?"

"I know nothing; I don't know whether I am for or against you! My orders were to get in touch with you, and I suspect there

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were supplementary orders that never reached me. 'Get in touch with you' might mean tag you, spy on you or serve you. I'll be honest about it. I know you are at outs with the Resident, which goes to show you are without official credentials."

Montgomery replied warmly: "On my honor—or what Madame Joulaud has left of it—I am working under direct orders from the London directorate of your Company. It is possible that, since I left London in great hurry, I arrived in Nigeria ahead of instructions to your Agent General."

"What can London know of the political situation out here—Kowa above all places?"

"They know that under the recent *entente cordiale* between England and France there is to be a definition of the boundary-line here and that if they aren't wide awake the high-muck-a-mucks of the Boundary-Commission will leave your Company's interests stranded high and dry. But while we are talking that slaver is intriguing our ruin. Explanations in their proper time. Just now the time is for action—quick, decisive and desperate action. There are big stakes at risk here. I have learned enough from the Lowan to know we are stacked up against the cleverest brains behind the *Société des Sultanats*. The immediate question is: Are you prepared to take a gambler's chance with life and fortune?"

"Don't crow so loud; you're not the only white in Africa who has donned a wizard's disguise. I'll give you your answer when I know what I am committing myself to."

"I mean to kidnap the Lowan!"

CHAPTER IV

TWO WHITE MEN AND A "GENERAL"

"WHAT!"

"Yes—kidnap the Lowan. It is the only way; if he gets into that fortified city beyond the Wady, not only the British but the *Société des Sultanats* will find themselves left. It is too long to go into explanations at this time, when action is imperative. The question is, are you game?"

"Your plan?" snapped Low.

"First, the Lowan, or the slaver, I perhaps should say, for the Lowan is his simple tool, sends carriers to-morrow to a Buduma village about a day's march from Kowa, where his French friends are bringing him cartridges, for he sent for me to-day to make ju-ju against the white man, lest the cartridges be rendered harmless by magic in the same way he thinks the powder was turned into gunpowder tea. Now if we could get our hands on those cartridges——"

"But, man alive, how?"

"Hear me out. The men the Lowan would send would be his carbineers in charge of our Housa 'General' here. Now if we can scare this Housa—— Wait; let me try. He's scared enough now to be putty in our hands." Saying which he turned suddenly on the ex-soldier, snapping sharp orders.

"Stand up! Attention!"

The fellow leaped obediently to his feet, standing at attention.

"You're a deserter. Shut your mouth till you're given permission to speak. You've borne arms against the British. Your life is forfeited. You think you are going to be big General of the Lowan's army. Bah! You dream. How long will it be before the white man comes with guns and wipes your army off the face of the earth? One moon—maybe two. Is that not so?"

Montgomery flung the words at the Housa, boring him with hynoptic eye, until the fellow shivered like an aspen.

He went on. "You think you can fool the white man, eh? Bah! We know all about you. We have ju-ju that sees everywhere. I see a gallows at Lokoja, and I see you hanging by the neck," Montgomery graphically enunciated, straining his eyes at a gallows he actually visualized.

The Housa dropped to his knees, groveling.

"Get up!" snapped his tormentor.

The Housa rose.

"Tell me how you thought to escape the white man's vengeance—how your foolish dream army and adobe city would stand against the field-guns?"

"Oh, aye, massa, the Lowan will set one white tribe against the other and make peace with the winner. He builds his city in no man's land." In almost a breath he had artlessly revealed much that was mysterious.

"Ah! I see a whole lot now," cried Montgomery, excited over the discovery. "The slaver, posted by his French friends as to the coming of the Anglo-French Boundary-Commission, calculates the Wady as the natural boundary to a neutral zone, where he will play the British against the French,

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until it grows too warm, then he'll sell out to the highest bidder. Now, my gallant soldier," he addressed the Housa, "where do you come in if he sells to the British? And what of the slaver's own ambitions? Suppose he is only using this Lowan, and using you, until the time comes to cast you off? How does Mohammed Boro cast off? Does he send you away with your head full of tales and arms full of cloth? No! He——"

Montgomery slowly drew the edge of his hand across his throat.

"Ah, that gets you, eh? Well, what if I promise you pardon and riches if you will serve me? Will you serve me?"

"Oh, aye, massa, I done see you know eberyting. I's ready."

"Swear it by Allah."

The Housa took the oath which binds the Faithful with the iron bands of superstition and fear even to death.

"Good. Now you go down to the Lowan. Tell him you escaped, and on the morrow you set out for those cartridges with your 'army.' And, mind, my eye is on you all the time. You will get further orders. Go!"

The Housa saluted, faced about and marched down the mountainside, absolutely resubjected to the military drill and authority which he had deserted. Montgomery turned to Low, whose head had been busy piecing together the situation revealed by this conversation.

"Low, we *must* stop the building of this city, and it is equally important that we get this Lowan in our hands."

"Why all this fuss over the Lowan, when the slaver is the real villain of the play?"

"If we hold the Lowan we hold the key to the ivory trade of Bornu and all the caravan routes!"

"I thought the Shehu of Kukawa held that, or why did the Company go to so much trouble to kidnap him from the French, and why have we supported him against all pretenders to the sultanate at such heavy cost?"

"This is not the time for political discussions. You've got to get busy and boss that Housa, and dump those cartridges, excepting what you and the Housa can smuggle among yourselves, which, with three carbines, you will bring here. Do it if possible without alarming the ten gunmen or destroying the Lowan's stupid confidence in his 'army.' Much depends on that."

"How about provisioning?"

"Easy. Come with me." Montgomery led the way to the caves, near which was a raised platform, set out with water-gourds and calabashes of millet-mash and yams, placed there as votive offerings for the spirits of the dead.

"Don't be afraid of it," said Montgomery. "I've lived on the fat of the land, supplied fresh every day. It is a wizardly graft, played from the Niger to the Zambesi."

Low began selecting his food, already cogitating the adventure ahead with that cautious calculation of chances and mischances born of many hard experiences. White dawn was beginning to rim the east, and it was his intention to take advantage of the cool sunup to get ahead of the Lowan's men and get the rest he would then need by sleeping through the hot forenoon. Montgomery accompanied him to the edge of the mountain trail, to point out directions and give something like an apology.

"It's awfully good of you, Mr. Low, to fall into the game this way—I mean, some fellows with your position and experience might object to playing second fiddle. I feel like a buttinsky; I've heard of your work and know that this is treading on your preserves. But I think there probably was no time to advise the Niger end from London of this trouble. Anyway, the work called for an experienced surveyor."

"Thank you, Montgomery," Low responded simply. "Your explanation removes a little feeling, I'll admit. As for playing second fiddle—I have learned to take orders. Good-by."

"Good-by, old man, and good luck. I've hard work to do myself—it's a case of Mohammed Boro or me. Good luck, again!"

CHAPTER V

JOB LOW STEALS AN ARMY'S GUNS

REACHING the bottom of the mountain path, Low got into his stride. A curious confidence permeated his cautious planning. A few hours before, his position had been more than desperate, almost hopeless. Now he was marching free in the refulgent dawn, through air cleared by the Harmattan, that had died away to a whisper, with the buoyant promise of action and deed ahead and a quiet assurance in the pluck and wits of his suddenly acquired

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fellow adventurer. He argued that it was himself and the Housa against ten Kanembus, armed, not with their accustomed assagais, but with ammunitionless carbines whose death-dealing potentiality they believed lay in some mysterious magic power. The real trouble would be to destroy the cartridges and send the fellows back to Kowa without a suspicion of his interference. Over this problem he sweated until the sun was high and the burning sands scorched the soles off his feet, when he sought the high grass, from which he built a rude protection from the sun and rested, calculating himself four hours ahead of the lazy-moving Kanembus. He had gone now without sleep for twenty hours, so to guard against being caught napping he resorted to an old trick, laying his body in such a position in the shadow of his grass-roof that the sun would, by rough calculation, strike full on his face in about three hours and wake him. He slept.

He dreamed of the kitchen stove of his English home. He was putting his face against the open fire. It burned. So he woke. The sun was roasting his face.

He sat up, drank a measured draft, ate of his mealies, and kept a watch on the Kowa trail, until he saw buzzards in the air. He knew the village scavengers were accompanying humans in hope of scanty pickings.

He took up the march again, keeping steadily an hour ahead of the buzzards, until the birds suddenly wheeled in the air and flew back to Kowa, as gulls accompany a ship from port to sea. However, toward sundown another flock of birds rose in the opposite direction and, flying high, hovered a moment above Low, then undoubtedly headed away for the Kanembus. Evidently they had risen from the Buduma village where the ammunition was to change hands. Low pushed on, fearful lest the Africans, ever on the outlook for signs of an enemy, had seen the birds wheel above him. Leaving the trail for the high grass he crept toward the village, whose roofs now showed like so many straw-ricks in standing grain. The questions uppermost in his mind were: Had the ammunition arrived? Would it be accompanied by a Frenchman? How much would he have to destroy? How would he declare himself to the Housa without giving his presence away to the Kanembus?

He crept cautiously through the grass, of which he made a covering for his head, that he might keep his eyes on the level of the grass and spy unseen. He found the Budumas peacefully squatted round their supper-pots, as harmless apparently as a flock of black crows. Suddenly he started at the flash of red. Next moment he saw the red coats of three Senegalese soldiers, one of whom sat on a wire-bound case. He quickly satisfied himself that there was but one case, then turned his attention to the Housa and his "army," now so near the village that the Budumas were watching the buzzards and running for their assagais. But they were easily awed by the carbines of the three Senegalese, until the Kanembus appeared with the swagger little Housa, who held his palms out before him in sign of friendship. The next moment he was fraternizing with the Senegalese and pouring into their ears his fairy tale of generalship, the French native soldiers listening with popping eyes and negro lust of authority.

Low still wanted a plan, and it was given him just then by one of those chance illuminations which a mind seizes when it is quickened by dilemma. A buzzard was scratching a hole; as its strong legs threw off the topping sun-bleached sands, the earth came up in a fine black powder. In a flash Low connected the black sand with the powder of the cartridges and conceived a dangerous plot.

THE first thing was to apprise the Housa in the most impressive way of his miraculous presence. He still had his beloved harmonica with him, and now put it to good use. Crouching in the grass he breathed from it a sweet rendition of reveille. The effect on the Housa and Senegalese was startling. To them it was a far-off bugle call to duty. They looked all points of the compass.

Low played the first line of "God Save the King." The Housa shivered, then drew himself to "attention." A sudden expression of understanding crossed his flat face and he said something to the Senegalese which calmed them and they all sat down to their supper-pots.

Low waited with perfect confidence. Sure enough, when they came to cast themselves on the sands for the night, the Housa sought a position on the outside of the circle, whence, the moment sleep took the others,

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he began to squirm toward the grass. Low crawled round to him, and whispered in a low, intense voice:

"My eye is on you!"

The Housa came to him, fawning like a whipped dog.

"What is it, massa? I's ready."

"Can you get me that case of cartridges, *for one hour?*"

The Housa made no answer, but squirmed away to the case, which he drew inch by inch from beside the sleepers until he had it where he could boldly shoulder it.

He eased it to earth at Low's feet.

"Give me your chop-knife," commanded Low. The "General" gave up the short, stout blade that serves the Housas for all purposes. Gently Low pried open the case and got to work on the cartridges. Prying the balls out of the shells he emptied the latter on the sand and tossed them to the Housa with the sharp command:

"Refill with sand, then replace the balls and clench 'em with your teeth."

It was slow and dangerous work. A slip of the knife might set off a grain of powder and explode a shell. Fortunately the shells were refills, clumsily done with poor tools at the French trading-station, so that the balls mostly came out freely, and the more tenacious shells Low put in his pockets, until they were crammed, when he made the Housa secrete about his person as many as he could. At last the work was done, the case rewired as if it had been untouched. Low rose, speaking to the cowed Housa:

"Give me three carbines, a gourd of water and what food you can lay hands on."

The Housa humbly accomplished this, an easy matter, as his men were sprawled in that deep sleep known only to savages and animals.

"Now," said Low, "carry out the Lowan's instructions as if nothing had happened. You will hear from me at Kowa. And, mind: *My eye is on you. Go!*" The Housa saluted as if he were on the Lokoja parade-grounds. Low shouldered the three carbines and took the trail to the mountain, the march proving tediously uneventful until he sighted Kowa, when a figure sprang from the grass and Low found himself fronting Montgomery, in his wizard's dress. Montgomery was excited.

"Did you make it?" he cried.

Low briefly summarized his adventure, then enquired how things had gone with Montgomery, who was forced to confess partial failure.

"I was getting along finely with the Lowan—had almost convinced him that the slaver is not his true friend, but is harboring designs inimical to the Lowan's authority—for such is the meaning, as I'll explain later, of the building of this fortified city—when in audience this morning the Lowan suddenly turned on me and charged me with hiding the white man who had come to rob him of his country. His eyes were as wicked as a red ass's and I saw it was time to move. Fortunately my ju-ju reputation awed his ruffians, or I wouldn't be here to tell the tale. Before they could raise their assagais I was through them and headed for bush. Listen: To-morrow the Lowan goes in a litter to inspect his new city, preparatory to moving his court there. Now his escort will undoubtedly be those gunmen he is so cocky about, in charge of our very scared Housa, whom we can safely count on to aid us. Thus we shall be three loaded carbines against a half-score guns choked with dead shells. We have only to reckon with the slaver's revolver and a few assagais. I propose to attack the Lowan as he crosses the Wady, taking his party by surprise at the bottom. Then with two carbines we'll hold back the pursuit, and one of us will slip along the bottom of the Wady with the Lowan. If we shoot or secure Mohammed Boro, our position will be doubly secure. What do you say to the plan?"

"It's not what *I* say, but what the Resident at Maifoni will say, to what practically amounts to murder and kidnapping. Have you any authority? I don't fancy any Doctor Jameson business. The South African Company let him shoulder their crime in a felon's cell."

"If Jameson had succeeded, he would have been a duke instead of a felon."

"It's all the difference between success and failure, eh?"

"That's the game the world over, whether it is a speculating banker in America, gambling on a mansion versus a prison, or a *Titanic* gambling on a record-trip versus an iceberg. You're game?"

Low thought a while before answering, and then it was a little dubiously. "I owe a duty to my folks at home, and——"

He paused, but suddenly flung up his head with determination. "All right. Who'll handle the Lowan?"

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"I've thought that out. If things go right, this deed will be lauded to the skies, and the man who handles the Lowan comes in for the right kind of advertising that leads to agent generalships. Now my position with the Company is temporary, nor does this fever-stricken country tempt me. So you take the plum; it's yours morally and every other way. Get the Lowan to the Bennue and smuggle him in canoe to Lokoja, and by the time you have him there you ought to have him convinced that you have saved him from a rascal; also, when you arrive, circulate a story that the Lowan is visiting the Company of his own free will. You ought to be able to show him that his best interests are furthered by the fib. Of course it's up to you to act as you think fit. But I am discounting the possibility of our separation, for I'm not going to leave Kowa without a reckoning with that mongrel slaver.

"One thing more; beware of the Resident. That Jack-in-office called me a 'Tup'n'y Yankee adventurer' because I did not tag along a pile of official recommendations, which would have implicated certain Big Ones at home if we fail and if a hue and cry is made in the British press. That is why the Company could not directly employ so well-known a man as yourself in this and merely gave you non-committal instructions to get in touch with me. That's a long spiel; now for action. Give me one of the carbines and a couple of rounds and we'll select our place of attack."

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF THE POLITICAL AGENT

THE Wady was a ravine, about three hundred yards wide and a hundred deep, with a stony bottom that proclaimed it a dried-up river-bed. The sides were steep; though, at the place where the Kanembus crossed, the declivity was graded by the passage of countless naked feet. Everything favored a sudden attack at the bottom of the ravine.

Here the two adventurers made a dead camp without fire in a clump of aloes. They saw the Housa and his "army" cross the ravine a short hour after sundown. Then they gave themselves over like old campaigners to the sleep so urgent for the strenuous morrow.

The morning brought a return of the Harmattan sand-storm, which was a piece of great luck, affording splendid cover for the attack. In the hours of their watch they talked calmly of the things remembered on the eve of desperate hazard—of the roses that would be blooming at home; of women and then, naturally, of Madame Joulaud.

"I made an awful ass of myself," Montgomery bewailed. "You see, I was taken off guard. I was positive no one on the coasts knew my object, and never thought that she would be sharp enough to see the value of my information and sell me out to the French. That lady must know this part of the world as well as most women know Regent Street. Gee, but I was a surprised man when that mongrel slaver told me all about myself! Though I did have him guessing over my surveying instruments. Of course, when I found I had played to Madame's tune like a sentimental kid, I just had to make good, so I went open-eyed into the slaver's trap—anything to get into Kowa. I was confident of finding a wizard's retreat and—— Ssh!" he suddenly cautioned, raising his head, listening.

From Kowa a furious discord of brass horns and hand-rattles proclaimed that the Lowan was on his way to inspect his new city. Low gripped his carbine, cautioning Montgomery:

"These things kick like the deuce and fling high. Sight low."

"I know 'em," said Montgomery, and added last instructions: "I'll join you if possible, but don't hazard success by waiting. Let's shake."

They solemnly shook hands.

Three Kanembus, with carbines, showed in blurred outlines on the bluff, then scrambled down the trail. Behind was a litter, borne shoulder-high by six blacks, then the Housa and the slaver, side by side.

"The Housa stays with me to cover your getaway," said Montgomery.

"Sure," Low replied. "Are you ready? We'll drop two of those cocky rascals in front and then rush 'em. Let her go!"

The rifles sounded together, and then again.

Two blacks dropped, while the litter-bearers dropped their burden and ran, followed by the carbineers, who swarmed up the precipice like beetles, without so much as sighting a gun. The Lowan rolled out of the tumbled litter and flopped around in

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his robes and fat. The Housa stood paralized. The slaver showed fight.

Not expecting any attack, he had not brought his revolver. But he snatched a carbine from one of the running Kanembus, and aimed at Low, whose longer legs had outdistanced Montgomery. The hammer snapped on the cap harmlessly. He quickly discharged the bad shell and shot home a second from the magazine, and this time pulled the trigger with his muzzle less than a foot from Low's face, with the same harmless result. The next moment he dropped to earth under a butt-end blow from Low's carbine.

Meantime the Kanembus had rallied on the bluff, but the guns on which the Lowan's pride rested proved useless, and they threw them away, escaping to the village.

The whole thing had fallen out so neatly that the two whites had nothing to do but to secure the spoils. With the helpless Lowan on their hands, they were vested with all the authority necessary to secure carriers and food through the wild countries to be traversed on the way to the Bennue.

WITH the peculiar fatalism of his race, the Lowan gave himself quite over to the will of his captors. At their instigation, he demanded food, which was immediately brought in by the various tribes, to Low's surprise.

"Great Julius Caesar!" Low exclaimed, staring at the state barge which had been placed at the Lowan's disposal, "why are all these chiefs so servilely anxious to serve this Lowan?"

"The answer is the key to the whole intrigue," Montgomery answered.

"The Shehu of Kukawa is an interloper whom the British set up as ruler of the Kanuri. So Kukawa became the trading center of the caravan-routes, and the Lowan of Kowa, who ought to be ruling in Kukawa, became the idol of a movement to drive the hated Kanuri and the white men from the country. The movement failed for want of guns. Such was the situation Mohammed Boro stumbled on. He intrigued with the Agent of the *Société des Sultanats*, who agreed to support him and supply guns.

"Now you know the recent *entente cordiale* between England and France resulted in the Boundary-Commission to define the spheres of influence. Your Company and the *Société* were anxious to get their own agents on the ground to secure treaties with the chiefs before the Commission got busy. Then I went and gave away the game to Madame Joulaud, who relayed it to the *Société*, who warned their agent the slaver, Mohammed Boro. So, to make up, I had to get into Kowa.

"As a 'wizard,' I discovered that Mohammed Boro was using both the *Société* and the Lowan to further his own ambitions. He knew the Wady would be the boundary, and he intended to have the Lowan move into a fortified city and secure the caravan-trade. Then he'd put the Lowan out of the way, marry his daughter, and usurp his place! He could do it by playing French and English off against each other, and sell out to the highest bidder when his place got too warm. So now you see why I couldn't confide in your blooming Resident. But it all comes out all right.

"We're accompanying this Lowan, who goes on a friendly visit," he winked, "to the Company, who'll make him their pensioner until the old chap succumbs to ennui and fat. As for the slaver, he'll hang at Lokoja, and, upon my word, I'm really sorry for him. He played with desperate courage. With gambler's luck he might be on the road to the Legion of Honor, or if he sold to the British, a K. C. B. and a harem of Circassian beauties. Heigho! I'll be glad to get my feet in new shoes; the Harmattan plays the deuce with leather."

"And I'll be glad to get official commendation of this adventure," said Low.

"Why, man, we're only convoying the Lowan on a friendly visit!" cried Montgomery, and never batted an eyelid!

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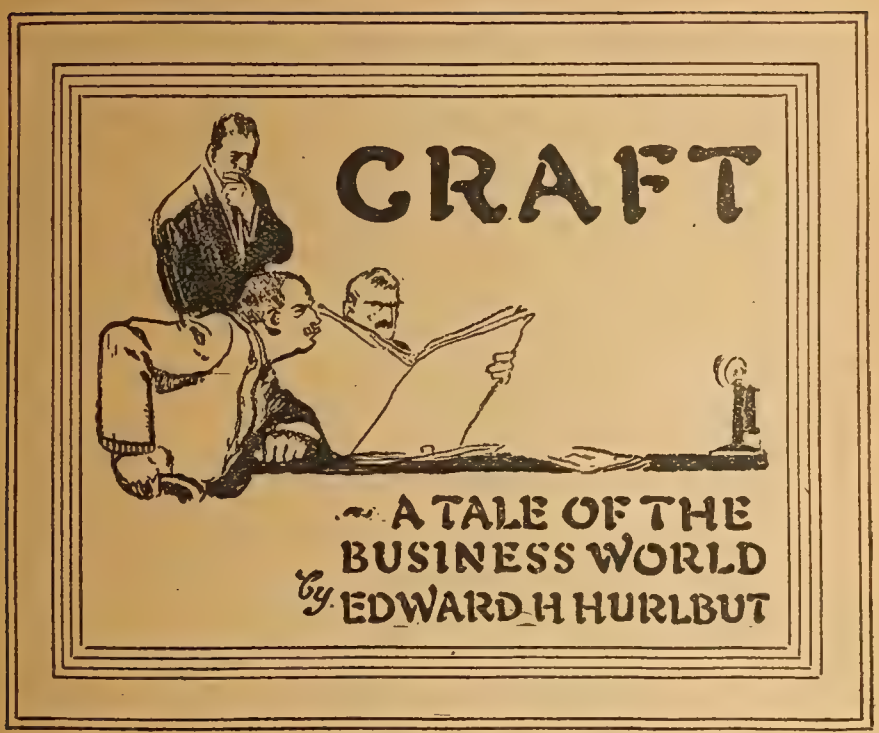

GARRETT, President of the Board of Public Works, sat drumming with his fingers on the mahogany of his flat-topped desk. Across from him sat Morton, of Morton & Sharpley, municipal contractors. Morton was likewise drumming with his fingers. Off in a corner, gazing from the window down over the irregular expanse of graveled roofs of buildings of lesser height, was Turner, City Architect, his hands, with their tapering, artistic fingers, clasped behind him, closing and opening with nervous jerks.

Garrett was gazing straight at Morton, who was gazing straight at Garrett. They were men of full feature, keen-eyed, firm-lipped—the American type of self-made men.

Turner was a younger man. A few of those gravel and mansard roofs that he overlooked topped structures of his own designing. He counted three or four, absently, as his eyes roved restlessly. Still in his early thirties, Turner was rated a coming man—or had been, he reflected with a sinking, before he yielded to the blandishments of suave politicians. They had taken him from his crayons and his squares and his dividers and had given him the post of City Architect. He had looked only upon the dignity of the thing; the responsibility that would be his as overseer of the expenditure of $7,500,000 of bond-money for public improvements: school-houses, fire-houses and the City Hall.

And now—floating up from the far depths of the street below came a shrill-voiced cry:

"Extral Extral"

Turner shuddered, and strained to hear more. But other than that word he could distinguish nothing.

Garrett and Morton continued to drum on the mahogany and gaze straight at each other. The sharp tattoo of the finger-nails might have been so many needle-thrusts, pricking into Turner, for he wheeled with a gesture of quick irritation.

The drumming ceased. Garrett pressed a button and his secretary entered.

"Send down and get that extra," he said.

Morton suddenly declared:

"Might as well face it. The morning papers will be straddling our necks in a few minutes and we have got to frame something quick."

Turner sank into a chair and buried his

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face in his hands. It appeared for a moment that he was about to cry. His shoulders shook and a stifled gasp escaped him. But he fought back any further exhibition and straightened up. His face had turned white and perspiration was moistening his forehead. He licked his lips.

"I can't see any reporter," he said, weakly. "You do the talking, Garrett. I can't seem—to get myself together. ——! My home town! All the boys I went to school with—the boys at—the club——" he paused for a moment, chokingly. Then a note of hard finality came into his voice. "There's one way out; only one."

He arose to his feet and like a man in liquor groped for the door to his own room. Garrett sprang for him.

"Here, man, that don't go!" he said. "Stiffen up, Turner. Stiffen up! You? You're a single man. Look what I have got to face, with a wife and six!"

Morton stepped unobserved into Turner's room and slipped a revolver from Turner's desk-drawer to his own pocket.

"Single!" moaned Turner. "Single!"

He huddled into a chair again and Garrett gazed down upon him curiously.

"Engaged?" he asked, bruskly.

Turner nodded, and Garrett and Morton exchanged quick looks.

The secretary entered and laid the evening paper upon the table. Across the front page was blazoned the red word: "EXTRA." Garrett coolly picked it up, Turner glancing up at him sideways, fearfully. Morton waited impassively for Garrett to speak. Garrett threw the paper back upon the table.

"Train-wreck," he said, shortly. "Six killed."

Morton breathed with obvious relief. "That throws us back just where we were. They must be holding it for to-morrow."

Turner seized the paper with eager fingers, greedily running down column after column, through page after page, down to the last want-ad before he drew a deep breath and said faintly,

"It isn't there."

The words seemed a cue for Garrett, dominant leader of men, dynamic right hand of the machine that controlled the city government, for he wheeled loweringly upon Turner.

"NO," he grated, in a tone that throbbed with ominous meaning, "no, it isn't there. It never was to be there. We were merely giving you the third degree, a taste of what we could do, to teach you just what sort of a cog you are in this machine. You submitted to one change in specifications; your O. K. is on the last progress report. Because you juggle with crookedness and sop your conscience by giving me a note for five thousand, do you expect to get by? Why, the papers would have you convicted before the grand jury voted the indictments. They're smelling around as it is for something on the administration. If you can't take the rowels any better than you have the last fifteen minutes you had better train along with us. The path is too narrow to turn, anyhow; you've got to keep on going."

The "progress" report was the bimonthly report of the City Architect to the Mayor, Board of Supervisors and Board of Works that all city work was proceeding according to specifications. The latest one, unsigned, lay on the table.

"The *Herald* hasn't an exposé then?" asked Turner, staring, the sinister import of all that Garrett said not yet striking home before the hysterical relief that swept him.

"No they haven't—yet." Garrett rapped it out like an automatic riveter. "When I told you their man came to me with a full account of your standing for the substitutions that would give Morton & Sharpley twenty thousand dollars and that you and I split ten thousand, I wanted to give you a taste of what it meant to have the pencil-pushers busy with your reputation—and incidentally your personal liberty."

Turner's staring eyes wavered and dropped.

"I took your five thousand, yes," he said, uneasily. "I was desperately hard pressed for money. I did not know until last night, and you know, Garrett, that I did not know, that your money was in the nature of a bribe. By that time I had disposed of it. I can not get it back now or I would. I have fought it all out. I was about to clear it up to-day when you played this horrible hoax on me. I have determined to stick with the job. It pays me four thousand a year. I can pay back the five thousand by serving my term out. If

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this is politics, Garrett," bitterly, "I am through."

"Well, this *is* politics, Turner," said Morton, cutting in. "What sort of an ingrate are you, anyhow? You are picked up here out of obscurity. You've got a reputation from the Bo Arts of Paris and a grip full of medals and you're just getting by with the rent for your skylight office and that's about all. We pick you up and give you the choicest job in the city government, me and Garrett. They were bidding for that job, do you know that, Turner? Why, look at the reputation you can make with all the bond-money to be spent on schoolhouses and fire-houses; and the City Hall coming on, too, as soon as the competition for plans is settled. You'll be known over the whole country. As for that last job, it didn't cost you anything, did it? You know in your heart the job is as well done with No. 3 as with No. 1 studding and joists. No. 1 studding and joists! Who ever heard of that in city work? It's insanity, that's what it is; downright insanity!"

There was virtuous indignation in Morton's voice.

"The city is paying for No. 1, though," said Turner, with some trace of spirit.

"Oh, well," said Morton easily, "it don't fall on you or me, particularly. Anyhow, I pay my taxes and stand as much as anybody else. The difference is a bonus to my experience in building-construction." He paused for a moment, to review the cogent argument, and chuckled. It appealed to him. It never had occurred to him in that light before. He emphasized it.

"That's just what it is. A bonus. I've handled some twelve millions of dollars worth of work in this town the last ten years. That predecessor of yours was a crank; a crank and crazy. That's what he was. We had to get rid of him and we picked you as the one man for the job in the whole city.

"Now it's up to you to make good for yourself. And," he tapped the progress report lying on the table, "you can't do any better as a beginning than to O. K. this report and leave the rest to us. As a matter of fact the bulk of the material is in. We took it for granted you would stand with us. You and Garrett will split seventy-five hundred. We thrashed that out last night."

Turner made no immediate response.

THEY had, as a matter of fact, picked Turner, scion of a family of little income but deeply rooted into the most patrician stock of Nob Hill, as a sop to the reformers who just then, on the eve of the primaries, were making threatening inroads in quarters where Garrett and the administration were being pressed to hold their strength.

One month in office, Turner had accepted a "loan" from Garrett of five thousand dollars. By a curious coincidence, after this friendly interest on Garrett's part, the next day had beheld Garrett suggest to Turner changes in specifications in the plans for five schoolhouses that had been awarded Morton. Garrett played on the friendship that had induced him to loan Turner five thousand. With inward reluctance, Turner had finally consented.

Following this first step the friendship between the three men—Morton seemed always to be of them—had grown more intimate. The atmosphere commenced to permeate Turner.

It seemed to be an accepted condition with all of these bluff, hale, prosperous and well-fed commissioners, assemblymen, State senators and big and little wheels of the local machine that he whirled with, that Money and Politics were one and the same. Last night the three of them had, as usual, been down at Frank's for dinner. A point had been reached where the wine had fused them all into one glad camaraderie.

A sudden swift glance had been flashed from Morton to Garrett—and then they had swept the curtains of their stage aside and, with the swiftness of a moving-picture film, had exhibited him to himself in the part he was playing and the part he was to play.

Stunned though he was for the moment, despite the wine, he had quickly caught their point of view. For the moment he was one with these men to whom Money and Politics were synonymous terms. He had laughed with them and shaken hands all around; and had absorbed the information that the five thousand was his "bit" on twenty thousand dollars made by Morton & Sharpley on his altered specifications. He had shaken hands, too, flush with wine, on propositions to come.

Turner was engaged to marry Dalles Phillips. The marriage had been postponed, owing to the invalid condition of

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the mother. A matter of five thousand dollars would send the mother to Berlin where alone the treatment that would save her could be secured. They were without such means as that.

When the opportunity had suddenly presented itself to secure five thousand, Turner, dazzled by the unexpected opportunity of serving his fiancée and her mother, had swiftly taken advantage of it; had overcome the conscientious scruples of Dalles at accepting the money; and had rested happy until the realization was driven home of the part he had played for the five thousand dollars, and the part he must continue to play. To ask for the money back was out of the question.

And to-day was the day of all days: for to-day final arrangements were to be made for the trip, tickets bought and the invalid and her daughter sent on the long journey.

As he reached his office, Garrett, sending for him, tossed over the last progress report for his signature. By that simple act he would cover up the jobbery going on with third-rate materials that was to net the ring fifteen thousand dollars. The most inquisitive grand juryman would accept David Turner's signature as he would his bond; and investigations would cease there. Garrett did not believe in wasting time. The preliminaries were over. The bargain was sealed.

Garrett busied himself signing letters and did not notice for some time that Turner made no move to pick up the report. When he did he looked the younger man over shrewdly.

"What's wrong?" he queried.

"Nothing—much," said Turner, slowly, "only I am going to back down. That's all."

He waited for an outburst, but none came. Garrett finished signing his correspondence, lit a fresh cigar and devoted several moments to a comprehensive survey of Turner.

"You're in pretty deep to back out," he said, finally, impersonally and pleasantly. "You're tossing up the chance of a lifetime. If it isn't you, it'll be somebody else. It's the game."

But Turner said:

"I'll pay you back the five thousand if I can finish my term. Otherwise you hold my note. If I can't remain honestly, then let it be some one else."

Without waiting for a reply, he walked to his own room, adjoining. Garrett said nothing, but the instant Turner's door was closed he took down his receiver and called Morton.

"Hell is popping," he said. "Come over."

Within ten minutes Morton was in Garrett's office.

"Turner's got religion," said Garrett, succinctly. "He's balked. Wants to hang on here till he can pay back the five thou."

Morton frowned and pondered long.

"Jim," he suddenly queried, "do you remember the first newspaper ball-out you ever got?"

Garrett breathed a soft oath. "I guess —*yes*," he muttered with emphasis.

"Kind of made you want to reach for the gun and pass out, didn't it?"

"It got me pretty strong, all right," admitted Garrett. "If the wife hadn't thought I was being made the victim of a political conspiracy and stuck like a post-age-stamp to me, maybe I would have. But what are you driving at?"

"Just this: Turner is a weak sister. He plays the club-game, does society and is a nob among the college graduates around the bay. If we just tell Mr. Turner that the *Herald* has an exposé on those altered specifications, make it good and realistic and let him sweat for a couple of hours until he sees that it isn't in the papers and then let him know that it's just a squeezer for him, I think he'll talk turkey. As a matter of fact, he could be indicted for that five thou to-day, even if the money was taken a few hours before the act was committed. We'll take him down the line along that direction. If I'm any judge of men he won't take the gad and if I don't have his O. K. on that report within twenty minutes I'll owe you a case of wine. Where is he?"

But Turner had stepped out to walk and think. He was expecting Dalles; and he did not want to meet her just then. It was the early afternoon before he returned, to find Garrett and Morton awaiting him in Garrett's office.

It was deftly, quickly and dramatically done, and when they had told their story of how Hammond of the *Herald* had come to Garrett with full details of the school-steal Turner had sunk crushed into a chair, to gaze blankly from one to the other, reading nothing in those clever graven faces

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but a well-feigned bitter determination to face the scandal with a better grit than he could muster. His fine determination had gone for naught; he was already fatally trapped in the nasty net of corruption that these thieves of character had spun for him. This day of all days——

THEN had come the disclosure of the hoax and the culmination when Morton had thrown down before the harassed and buffeted architect the report and tapped to indicate the spot where he was to fix his endorsement.

"I can't do it," Turner repeated doggedly. "I am in bad enough as it is. I can not go further."

"Well let me tell you," snarled Garrett, "that you can and you must! There isn't one chance in a million for you to go back. Turner, if you think you are going to welch now I'll stand trial myself before I'll let you get by!"

Garrett brought his fist down upon the report. It was more than simulation that swelled the corded veins out on his temples. The game was harder than he had figured.

"—— you, I say you sign those papers and let's have no more of this kid stuff! You're in this thing; in it right up to your neck. And I'll get you, mark me; I'll beat any case against myself or Morton and I'll see that you go over. We've got the money; we've got the judges; we have got the sheriff and we can get the trial juries. What have you got? Nothing; absolutely nothing. The newspapers will hound you to suicide if the jury don't first send you to San Quentin.

"Now you take your choice, Turner. Stick with us and we will take care of you. There ain't a chance of our ever letting anything happen to you. We protect our people. All you do is O. K. the report and sit back and take the profits. It's up to Morton and me to keep the inspectors fixed so that their reports jibe with yours. You ain't got a worry. Come now, Turner; we're all good friends together; sign up and let's go get a bottle of wine and forget this little mess."

Turner slowly arose. He looked in bewilderment from one to the other, with a mute appeal that was pathetic in its ingenuousness. But neither Garrett nor Morton was watching him; they were looking at each other with that full look they so frequently exchanged, of assurance, of confidence, of power. Turner threw one hand before his eyes. It was such men as this that he had trusted! Battling the thing out, he stood a moment irresolutely.

Disgrace! Disgrace! Disgrace! It drummed through his mind with the monotony of a lock-step shuffle. He never for a moment doubted that these men of adamant with their corrupt machine could and would railroad him to San Quentin and go scot-free themselves.

Disgrace!

Now of all times; to-day of all days——

It must not be; he must gain time until Dalles with her mother was out of the country. Then, if exposure must come, it would at least be softened by distance, even if it reached to her.

To that high-minded girl no explanation could be possible. He had accepted a bribe to violate his public trust! He knew how she would look upon it, with her fine ideals and her faith in him. For her to know now would only mean that the money would be returned and the one chance of saving the mother's life abandoned.

No; they must be on their way; the breach with Garrett and Morton must be deferred.

He sat down again and reached for the pen from the massive brass inkstand. His brain was in a whirl. The pen was still poised uncertainly over the report when from his own office his secretary entered.

He spoke two words to Turner, but had the secretary pulled the strings that jerked into activity three manikins the effect could not have been more startling.

The tableau was broken; Morton and Garrett looked no more with that gaze of assurance upon each other. Turner straightened quickly upright.

"Miss Phillips," the secretary said.

Garrett sensed the danger; felt the situation about to slip from his control. He stepped quickly to Turner's shoulder as Morton swung alertly around and leaned across the table. The pen had dropped from Turner's fingers; splotching the report as it rolled slowly.

Not a word had been spoken yet. They might have been acting under the direction of a stage-manager, moving automatically.

"Endorse that report," said Garrett tensely, as Morton handed back the pen,

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"and let us have this business over. The substitute work for the past week is already covered; all the lumber is on the ground and included in the report. There isn't a chance in the world of a kick, but we have got to keep the records straight on their face." He was talking incisively. "Sign there, Turner, and take another five thou. I raise you a bit. You can use it, can't you?"

He had thrown before Turner a package of currency. It was the last straw—Dalles or no Dalles! Thoughts of all but the present moment flashed from his mind. The architect sprang to his feet. He struck Garrett full in the face.

"—— you! —— you and your corruption!" he cried. "I'm through, I tell you! Try to railroad me if you dare! I'll go before the grand jury myself and tell all! I'll go to the newspapers! Let me away from here! You have played me far enough!"

He picked up the bills and flung them into Garrett's face; the right arm of the stalwart commissioner was drawn back to strike. Blood trickled from his cut lips.

THERE was a swish of skirts and a white-faced girl had thrown herself between the two men.

"Don't you dare!" she panted. Unobserved, she had followed the secretary into the room and as he retired she had involuntarily remained to hear the quarrel. Garrett glared upon her.

"Excuse me, Miss," he said finally, wiping his lips, and seating himself coolly. Morton sat down also. If it were possible, Turner's face was whiter as he gazed upon her. She turned to him; her large blue eyes staring widely upon him in horror and disbelief.

"What is wrong, David?" she asked. "Another five thousand—what did he mean?"

He walked toward her heavily.

"Nothing, Dalles; a mere matter of business. Nothing at all that you should know." He would have led her to his own office but she refused to move.

"There is something wrong here; there is accusation; talk of the grand jury. What have you done? Is it about the other five thousand? Tell me, David, is it?"

Before those clear eyes, searching his soul as directly as Truth itself, his own eyes wavered and fell. She read her answer in his action.

"You have done something dishonest for that money?" she said, levelly; but her bosom was beginning to rise and fall.

He made no answer.

"Answer me, David," she said.

"Yes," he said.

"You—you stole from the city—your Native City?"

He threw back his head and looked upon her.

"It amounted to that," he said, simply. His dream of love with this girl—the poor invalid mother—his future—they were all gone. He was helpless, miserable, but defiant in his moment of supreme bitterness.

"You were never dishonest before?"

"No! Never in thought or deed!" he burst out, passionately. "But it is done and can never be undone. Go your way, Dalles; take your mother away and forget if you can. I will go to Japan. There is a field there. I'll begin all over."

She appeared not to hear him. A film of tears had suddenly veiled her eyes as she looked upon him.

"It is this, then," she said slowly, her voice trembling softly. "You robbed to save—my mother's life!"

Only his bowed head, sinking again to his breast, answered her.

"My poor, poor boy!" she said, with a catch in her voice. She was opening her purse with feverish fingers. "Here, here it is, all of the money you gave me! I came to tell you. I tried to telephone all day, but you were not in. Mother—the excitement of the coming journey, the thought of leaving her home here for what might be the last time—it brought on another shock. She has been stricken and can not be moved. So it was all in vain and here is the money and now let us give it back and leave this horrible atmosphere of corruption. For I know that it is that. Let's go and fight our way together!"

For a moment they stood still, while, the strain over, she gave way to convulsive sobbing.

Then Turner swung around on Garrett and Morton, silent observers. Garrett had a hard, cynical smile around his bruised lips and was lighting a fresh cigar. He had lost; but he would see that he fitted a better cog to his mechanism next time.

Morton, it would appear, was wearing an expression of relief. The Turner type was new to him, and he was too busy a

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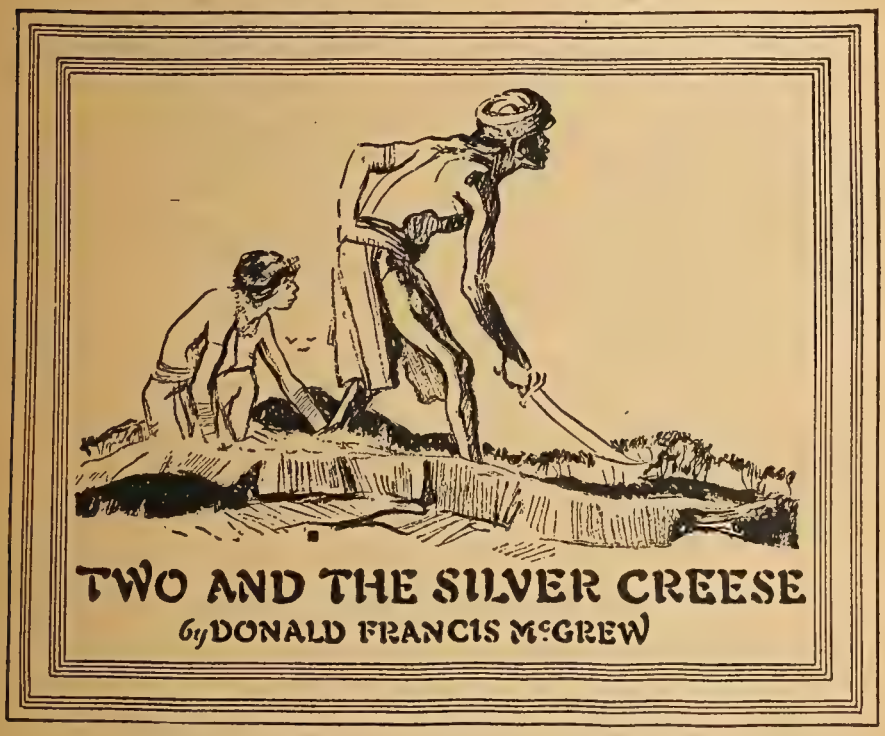
man to try and figure it out further. And anyhow, he had turned out like his predecessor to be a plain crank. Morton, as a municipal contractor, had no use for cranks. They were invariably filled with crazy ideas about the rights of the taxpayer to specific performance on public contracts.

"Gentlemen," said Turner, as he tossed the second package of bills to the table beside the first, "I am going back without prejudice to my 'grip full of medals' and my 'skylight office.' As a crook, I'm a failure. Here is where we part—officially. But I insist that this graft stop. I intend to act as a committee of one to watch this bond-work. If there is any more crookedness I will go before the grand jury and make a clean breast of everything. Meantime you will have to get another 'cog' for your machine, Garrett; but I would suggest that the 'cog' be a 'crank,' for the protection of you both! Good-by!"



TWO AND THE SILVER CREESE

by DONALD FRANCIS McGREW

THIS, my story, is principally the tale of a man, a woman and the Silver Creese. Others took strenuous part, but with the two, Myago and Mauna, we have most concern. There is action, blood-letting, great strife, all in medieval surroundings, all perpetrated by beings whose impulses bordered on the primeval; but, above all, the relating of how a man's heart grew rich in the midst of adventure. Therein lies the best of the tale.

THERE was grave concern in the *casa* of Dato Juava. In a nutshell, the sour looks had sprung from the unheard-of actions of a girl, a girl named Mauna, whom old Dato Molayo had sent to Juitori, Juava's eldest son, as a gift-wife. Ah, Mauna was a girl of parts, a girl of sorts by the shades of Allah, but a girl of fire, as Myago would see should he ever run across her. So old Juava spoke to his second son, Myago, who had just returned from one of his many trips to the southern seas.

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In a game of salincan, Juitori had bested old Dato Molayo. Molayo could not pay in full. The girl came as a sort of peace offering—a matter of interest, as it were, so that Juitori might hold the debt in abeyance until such time as Molayo might meet it in full.

Juitori's eyes had been hot for the girl. But had she reciprocated? With fire of another kind, yes. Juitori lay under an awning with his shoulder slit by a dagger-stroke. The girl was gone, fled to the care of the cursed Christian priest at Iligan.

After a moment, Myago stood up. He was the half-brother of Juitori, being half Saiwori, suckled by Juava's second wife. He had little in common with his kinsmen. He was lean-shanked and tall, with the arched thighs of a rider and square, wide shoulders that promised, in company with his firm jaw-line, a fulfilment of aught he set out to do. He had the brow line of a Sioux, the straight nose of a Greek, the full lips of the Moro and, since he did not use the betel-nut, boasted a mouthful of strong white teeth.

It was known of him that he thought much, spoke little, acted quickly, loved a fight for the sake of it, loved the sea more, had little in common with women, laughed best when the blades whistled keenest, had a eye ever on the horizon to see what was on the other side. Finally, he was young; young with the fresh manhood of youth.

He did not know the girl in question; could not place her. But, since his father had indulged him to the extent of a *banca* on his last trip home, he would repay to this extent.

"To cause trouble with Molayo over foisting this wench upon you would be like a man with colic, sire," said he. "Trouble in the tribes with the Spanish fostering new expeditions would be bad for all. Listen. I go northward on a mission of my own—" Myago did not mention what it was—"and I will seek the girl. It will but be in my path. Three of your men may go with me. She will return with them. This will be better than attacking the town, and nothing gained but lost trade," quoth Myago. Juava grunted in acquiescence, and Myago stepped over to the awning that covered his brother. He had little love for this slack-mouthed, sullen hulk of a Juitori, knowing him for a cowardly poltroon, quick to murder where murder could not get back at him, prone to a lust for women, tricky in matters of trade. Yet he gave him a merry smile, inquired of his health and immediately stated half the nature of his next adventure.

Juitori's eyes glowered at him from the evil mask of his sick face.

"I have let much blood," he growled, "or I would be on that bent myself. See that you get her safe for me. And lay not a hand on her, do you hear? I will have her to do with as I will, the wanton!"

"You will kill her, then?"

"Kill? Have you seen her? No? You have ridden many times to Molayo's *casa*."

"Even so, I would have paid small attention. Maids for those that care for them."

"It would be better," growled Juitori, sourly, "if your shoulders carried some of the weight hereabouts rather than poking your nose so persistently toward the sea. A maid in her place would go far toward quieting you. But this maid—" Juitori rose on his elbows and gritted the last—"this maid is mine, *mine*. Bring her back to me untouched."

FOLLOWING that, Myago left, mentally casting his nose like a fish seeking for air. Juitori radiated a sour atmosphere singularly depressing to a youth who loves the sea and the fresh green things of the earth. Myago was glad when he and his men were fair on their way down the old Spanish trail toward Iligan and Iligan Bay.

For the sake of his blood he would right the wrong this girl had done his blood. But for the sake of himself—ah, but he had the great adventure in view! On his last trip he had heard of the whereabouts of the Silver Creese. A New Hebrides boy he had befriended told him the tale, and it would be, if the tale were true, at a certain *casa* midway between San Salvador and Cagayan, toward the Montescan country, in the possession of an old Visayan. He laughed as he dropped down the last slope of the trail into Death's Valley, the scene of Cortijo's slaughter. He had caught a view of the bay to the north, lying in the shape of a horseshoe. Around the hazy extremity in the distance lay Cagayan and the *casa* he sought.

His nostrils arched eagerly as he thought of the booty there. To him the Creese meant the price of a new boat, a big boat, a schooner such as he had seen many times and longed for in the big ports. With it,

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manned by a crew he would pick, he could drift forever and ever of his own free will, trading where he desired, smuggling opium or arms, trading for copra, fishing for pearls —in a word, *living*, as a man should. His Saiwori blood thrilled at the prospect. Poof! Why should a man go twisted-mouthed for women, especially one who had so plainly shown her aversion to the marital state?

Near sunset, nearer than he thought, Myago was presenting himself at Father Jacques's manse. One of his men had been sent west to the mouth of the Argus, where Myago's big *banca* and crew of six men always ran in out of the way of the coast patrols. The man had orders to bring up the boat after nightfall, holding it within the coral reef until he should join them. The other two men had been sent to the Moro market-place, there to engage in desultory trade as an excuse for their presence in town, until he should order them further.

It was a strange room he entered now—that is, a room strange to him. Priestly it could scarcely be labeled. It was enriched with the books and tapestries beloved by a recluse. But Myago gave scant attention to it. His eyes were all for the man. And, instantly, as he took in the thoughtful, kindly eyes below the white-fringed poll, whatever thoughts of subterfuge he had in mind fled. All Mohammedan tales of Christian priests to the contrary, here was an honest man.

"Speak your own tongue, Son of the Sea," said Father Jacques, when Myago had commenced in halting Spanish. "I know it well. What is it you will have of me?"

"I will have, then, a girl who came to be wedded to my half-brother of the blood, a girl who slit his shoulder at the outset, and who ran away in the night. The tale has it she is here."

"Was she indeed wedded to your brother, then, and did she come willingly as a gift-wife?"

The boy might have lied. But he did not.

"Of that I am not sure. It is quite possible she did not, since," dryly, "Juitori is more for cursing now than making merry. As for wedding, there has been no word of our priest as yet."

"Then she is free, my son."

"She is a Moro, bound by the law."

"Nay, son, she is a Samoan, seized by force as a child. I took her in. She has kissed the Cross."

"Is she here?" asked Myago, looking him direct in the eye.

Father Jacques shook his head.

"Then where is she?"

The priest came closer, and asked,

"Is it for yourself you want her, my son?"

"No. For her rightful husband."

Sighing, and seeming about to speak at more length, the holy man opened his lips, then closed them and turned away.

"Then I can not tell you what you ask. Is there more I might do for you?"

THERE seemed no more, and Myago left. Surrounding the *hacienda* was a fence of bamboo paling, inside of which palms were planted on either side of the coral walk leading to the gate. It was against his grain to make war on unarmed holy men of any creed. He was out of view of the house under the palms, still pondering what to do, when he ran into a Tagalog boy hurrying with candles in his hand. Myago's hand shot out and clutched his shoulder.

"Boy," said he in Spanish, "are you of the church?"

"*No sé, no sé,*" whined the lad.

The hand tightened. "*Sabes esto?*" frowned Myago.

The lad winced, and in a trice Myago had the information from him. Myago smiled inwardly as he reflected that Christianity had not alleviated the Tagal's fear of the Moros. He made himself doubly fierce, playing on the boy's fears to insure future silence. Then he hurriedly departed.

Mauna, the gift-wife, was at San Salvador, with Father Piotosi!

Suddenly Myago's smile faded, as he heard the crash of a gun booming across the water. The tramp of feet followed, and the swish of starched trouser-legs swinging rhythmically behind the band. It was the evening parade. He had intended walking across the plaza, but now he turned back and skirted through the grove. He had no rifle, but carried a bolo. This would be taken from him after the evening formalities, should he pass the fort. Furthermore, he knew that no Moros were allowed the freedom of the town after nightfall, and hastened to reach his men unobserved, before the guard was placed over them to herd them at the market for the night.

He was late, however. Two gray-clad men, with stiff gray caps atop their bristly

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black hair, stood guard at the south end of the market-shed as he entered from the east. Bololess and despondent, his yokels squatted upon the ground, having waited for him to do their thinking. They looked up and watched him closely as he approached the sentries from a tangent.

Afterwards, Myago remembered the scene's details more clearly than he noted it now. Perhaps it was because nothing in the scene save the two sentries had any significance for him at the moment.

Back of the Spaniards was a narrow curving street, lined with weather-beaten booths that stretched down to the sloping sands of the river mouth and beach. Beyond them was the pile of mildewed masonry constituting the fort. Through a gap in the bamboo shacks Myago could see from one to two hundred *bancas* beached on the sands and, anchored out near the reef, a small schooner from which a boat was even now landing.

A white man, evidently a Spaniard, strode up the beach from the small boat. The crew were like no men in the Philippines. They were black, squat, pot-bellied; wore boar tusks, clay pipes, buttons and other articles strung through their noses and ear lobes. Perhaps it was the unusual aspect of these South Sea islanders that attracted the attention of the two sentries, for, where they should have been walking apart, with a quick eye to their duty, they were standing together, leaning on their rifles, very probably cursing the Colonel for ordering these extra guards.

Myago was advancing obliquely toward them.

The first soldier's hand reached out indolently for the bolo that Myago was unwrapping from his sash. Then Myago's right wrist twisted. The blade circled, still in the split sheath, and came down, broadside-to, on the second man's head. He fell without a groan. The nearest soldier's first move was to bring up his rifle. But he was too late.

Myago's left hand grabbed it even as he released the bolo with his right. Using both hands then, Myago fell on the surprised Don like a storm. He twisted, whipped the gun from his hands, beat him over the head and felled him before the onlookers' cries had reached the fort.

Myago now seized both rifles and belts, ran hard for the northern end of the beach—which was out of sight of the fort—scattered a pack of yelping Tagalog *banceros* and, with the two Moros leaping to the outrigger, had shoved clear a *banca* before the fort had awakened to the significance of all the noise.

The swift-falling twilight thickened as they sped away. Some of the shots did eventually strike the craft, but no one was hurt. Myago only laughed.

"Two of the Christian dogs dead to your account," grunted one of his morbid followers, grown bold to intimacy at sound of the laugh.

Myago frowned.

"No, not dead. Stunned. You look for blood for blood's sake. Poof! What chance did they have?"

They answered nothing, perceiving that this youth, though too cock-sure in his own mind, was no vampire for killing, creed or no creed. Coming to the big *banca*, talk ceased save for necessary orders, action became hurried, the sails were spread to the breeze. She heeled over and headed swiftly for San Salvador, to the north.

Back in Iligan the commotion died down after a time. It seemed that the Spaniard of the schooner had been bent on an interview with the *Comandante* when the sentries were downed. Even then his offer of the schooner would have availed them little, as he had no search-light aboard. But when a certain choir-boy, recovered from fright, came bursting with his news to the officer, it changed the aspect of things to a marked degree.

The Spaniard's boat was the only one in the harbor. It was at the Colonel's service. Thus argued Señor Estrella, who had some trading concessions in view. In the end the schooner was off for San Salvador, with a squad of soldiers aboard.

II

SAN SALVADOR is a town unique in that it possesses but one street, which stretches straight as a string along the beach for a good three miles. Behind this street the mountains rise, heavily forested, against the sky. The beach is shaded by an immense coconut-grove, whose trees stand thick and straight and solemn like columns in a cathedral. In the daytime the sea forms a swath of merry blue along this garden spot, while the tops of the palms, stately and green, toss ever up and down

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above a row of nipa houses as clean and yellow as gold. They are a prideful and cleanly lot, the Visayans of San Salvador.

But on such a morning as when Myago came to the town, with the moon filmed over by slate-hued clouds, the church that rises high in the central part of the *barrio* takes on the aspect of a sentinel set to watch the tinier sheep about it, its somber presence seemingly intensifying the canyon gloom of the inland mountains. Even his men felt it, as they beached the *banca* and stole on up through the grove.

But they said nothing, waiting for his word.

"Stay here," he ordered them then. "There will be nothing for you until I come with the maid. Then we drop away from the *barrio* and come at the *casa* below here."

The church stood some distance back from the road. Lights, though dim, were apparent at the altar end. He came nearer found the doors ajar, pushed them open a short way and peered in.

A priest in yellow vestments was going through the ritual of the Mass, while around him were the natives, men and women, all kneeling before the crucifix, receiving Christ's body in communion. He sniffed in some disgust, as became a Mohammedan, but, after a glance about him in curious wonder at the interior, Myago waited for the end of the ceremony. Then he strode forward to the altar.

One woman moaned low. Another cried out sharply at sight of this brown filibuster. But the priest answered him quietly enough. And immediately there stood forth a girl, trim and neatly formed, in the first outcroppings of maturity, with a wealth of black hair shrouding her shoulders; sweet-lipped and star-eyed. She had grown tremulous and rosy red at sight of Myago.

Myago did not look at her. His eyes were on the priest. This one did not engender so much respect as he felt for Father Jacques. He would not bandy words with him but would come straight out and force the issue.

"Come with me, then," said Father Piotosi. He nodded at Mauna, and the three stepped into the priest's antechamber, where a boy lit candles and departed.

"Now," began the priest in his slow Moro, but Myago had gasped aloud.

The priest's eyes followed the Moro's and understood. Hanging on the wall was the Silver Creese, shining like a thing of life in the candle-light. Its silver blade, its bejeweled haft, its scintillant ebony handle—they shone in the soft rays, each jewel reflecting the lights from its heart like the bosom of a lake on a soft, still night. The thing's intrinsic value hit Myago a gloating blow, but his first sight of those jewels, with the mysteries of centuries glowing in their hearts, sank even deeper, so that he drew a great hot breath and whispered in a voice he could not call his own, "It's mine, it's mine!"

Mauna, still rosy, now paled, and spoke for the first time.

"Myago! Have you come—for me?"

Myago turned away reluctantly, and faced her. "Yes," he said, "it is for you I came. Are you not wedded to Juitori?"

"No," she said.

"In the eyes of the law, yes. You will go back."

Myago was too full of astonishment at finding the Creese here to note the fading light in her eyes. He turned upon the priest. "This maiden, as I said, ran from the home she should go to by Moro custom. She belongs to my brother. Does she come peaceably or otherwise? Understand, she comes."

"It lies with her," Piotosi said with sudden warmth. "She has kissed the Cross."

"What do you say?" asked Myago, turning to her.

The maid lifted her eyes to him, looked deep, sighed at what she saw there and dropped her head somewhat listlessly. Myago took it for acquiescence, for he returned to the priest.

Said he:

"You have on your wall the Creese fashioned by the hands of Qudrat. How comes it in Christian hands? Not honestly, I judge."

The priest became in a flash the burly his jowl denoted him. He swung forward and crashed a mighty fist upon the table.

"Hear me, you Moro cutthroat," he bellowed. "That Creese came into this house by the hands of an old Visayan, now dead. Right or not right, it stays here. As the story goes," he sneered heavily, "no Moro took it down off the mountain nor sought it until a Christian undertook the deed. I repeat, it stays."

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WHAT Myago would have answered then is doubtful. He laughed, leaning forward. The priest must have feared the leopard light in his eyes, for his hand jerked into the open drawer of his table. The surprised Moro was caught off guard, so that he had scant time to dodge when Piotosi fired. As it was, the bullet took him heavily along the side of the head.

After that, Myago could not have sworn what was what in that wild night's ending. As from afar came a jumble of yells and staccato reports, as well as commands in heavy Spanish.

This he sensed but dimly. His impressions were a curious jumble of fighting, running, of feeling cool hands upon his head, now and then. At times he had the Creese in his hands, so it seemed. Again there were a dozen shaved holy-men mocking and dancing round him, each with a Creese in his hand. He was pulled. He was shoved. He was made to run, against his sluggish will, until he cried out in vexation like a baby. But in the end the pain of his wound gained the upper hand; he slipped into oblivion and rest.

III

MYAGO came to with the delightful sense of warmth about him; that warmth which is most comfortable when the morning air is chill. It was morning, he could see that, for the sun was just begging leave to peep over the hills. Birds sang, the dew lay cool and fresh on the foliage and all the great forest pulsed with the approach of pleasant day.

He felt drowsy again. He thought to sleep. He lay back on his pillow, felt it throb and stir. Then, wonderingly he looked up into two shy eyes.

"By the grace of Allah!" he swore softly. Recollections flooded upon him. His hand went to his head and found a bandage. Then he thought of the Creese, and raised himself.

"How is this?" he inquired, almost roughly. "Where is the Creese?"

"Sire, it is here."

He took it eagerly, paying no attention to the wince she gave. When he had assured himself that here was the Creese in truth, he bade her explain. She did so, stating that the Spanish had come upon his men in the grove, all unexpected. There had been much shooting. That all of his men were either dead or sore wounded she was sure. As for Myago himself, she had been lucky enough to bring him away from the turmoil.

"But the priest?" he asked, remembering.

"I did but trip him unaware."

"And this Creese?"

"You wished it, sire," she said simply.

He patted her on the head, and she shrank from his touch as if it thrilled her painfully. She had omitted much. But after a pause Myago spoke again.

"Tell me. You stabbed Juitori to get away. Why did you help me, the one who came to take you back to him?"

"Sire, does it matter much?"

Women were often beyond him. He looked puzzled a moment, then muttered, "No, not much, after all."

He studied a bit. Surely this maid, who knew but little of him, as he thought, could not be too well disposed toward him.

"I am not without gratitude," he told her. "And I have, through you, a whole body and the Creese I sought. But I have given my word to take you to Juitori."

"Is it your wish that I go?" she asked in low tones.

"Why, yes—yes, assuredly. Are you not a wife?"

Mauna did not answer, but handed him a broken coconut to drink from, as well as producing some camotes baked under a pebble-hearth.

These he ate gratefully and, as he ate, gave her his plan.

"We will go," said he, "through the inland marsh, skirting Iligan; thence through the Lenamon past Maol, and home. Then when I have turned you over to Juitori—well—do you see this, girl?"

He fondled the Creese lovingly, and went on to talk beyond his wont, telling her of his rosy plans for the sea and adventure.

Through it all the girl listened heavily. Was he blind? Could he not see? She, who could have let him die in the manse, had struck to kill for his sake, and brought him safe away even at the risk of going back to the Moro she hated. And he could not see!

Ah, well, what was she, anyhow, in comparison to this mighty youth? All the island knew him as a youth above all, a fighter whom men loved to fight beside, a youth happy under even the sourest sky. Why should she not love him? From the time he

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had made his first visit to Molayo's *casa* she had longed and ached for the lad as only a Saiwori maid can, but he had never looked at her, nor even seemed to sense her existence.

It was odd that she loved a man with blood in him she detested, since no Moro had ever treated her kindly. But the fact remained and—well, she would not put it away if she could. Even that Creese, that wondrous blade he looked at now, received more of his thought than she who had saved it for him!

The youth laughed on, and the tears welled close to her eyes. She fought them back at the thought that at least the Creese was inanimate, had no hands to serve him, could not whisper his name over and over like a sacrament. Love and travails had made her head light. She fell to pitying the Creese intensely, until, realizing her jealous folly, the pity turned inward and throned herself.

So the tears came in spite of her.

Myago broke off in his predictions. He frowned at her.

"What causes the tears, girl?"

"Sire, will you turn me over to Juitori to do with as he will?"

"Yes."

The girl looked long at him. There seemed to be much that was unsaid all but brimming over her lips; but she forced the words back. She said, however,

"Sire, here is my neck. Let it be severed here!"

Myago's eyes opened wide. He arose in agitation and fell to walking back and forth. This girl's aversion must be deep indeed, to desire death before marriage. Her attitude, her air, something he could not define, had struck him to pity.

"Look you here," he mused to himself, "here is a maid in sore straits of the heart, ready for death rather than joining Juitori. Can you blame her? You have promised to take her back—but look you now—had it not been for her where would you be? Where the Silver Creese? Is it well to be ungrateful?"

Turning to her, he said, "Mauna, I am not ungrateful. What would you have me do?"

"Do?" Oh, the blind man, oh, the dunce! "I would have you do as I ask, sire—give me to death—if you would take me back to him."

"Then," said he, "Juitori will go hang-mouthed for the rest of his days, for all he will get of you. You may step to my back, maid. My arm shall be yours until I have turned you back to the honest priest at Iligan. Come with me."

IV

TWO nights later Father Jacques sat in his study quietly musing over the ways of the species, while he sipped the while at his beloved vintage and watched the rise of a moon that flooded the palms and beach and shacks in a silver flood. Over the *barrio* lay a great peace, that drifted in his blood like the sough of the palm-tops. He was nearer asleep than awake when a knock came at his door, and he arose to welcome Myago and Mauna.

Father Jacques swallowed his surprise, hurriedly closed the door, bade the girl be seated and turned to Myago.

The youth stood leaning on his rifle, so that Father Jacques caught only a glimpse of the handle that protruded above the thing strapped to his back.

"My son," said the holy man, "you have taken great chances coming here."

Myago shrugged. "I came," he said, "because this maid has saved my life and placed me in her debt. I can not bring myself to take her to an unwilling marriage. If you will take her, she wishes to stay here."

"Do you know they will hang you if caught? The sentries did not die, but there are grave scores against you. All of your men were left hanging in the palms at San Salvador as a warning, they report. And the good father lies ill of a badly broken head. Did you do that, Myago?"

"No, father," the girl interposed. "It was I."

In a moment the father had the whole tale from them.

"I can not countenance his act," said he at last. "He had no right to the thing. I am not a superstitious man, but the blade were better off in the sea from all I have heard of it. Take it, sell it, get all you will of it, my son. If it do you good, you will be the first served so by it! But there is one thing you can not see. You have greater wealth than that, would you but open your eyes!"

Myago only stared, and the father sighed. "I speak of the richness of the heart, my

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son. However, let it pass. Do you know that your father's caravan is camped in the eastern grove?"

"So? Then I will do well to talk to them."

"You will not tell them Mauna is here?"

"No. But I have broken my word to Juitori and I will tell him why. Perhaps I shall straighten his sour mouth in the bargain."

"You will not let the soldiers capture you?" spoke Mauna for the first time.

"Poof!" snorted Myago, very scornfully. "Waste your fears on the Spaniards!" And he was gone.

With all his nonchalance, however, he took proper care to skirt the last shacks in reaching the coconut-grove where the caravan camped. Nor could Myago shake off his growing thoughts of the girl. Strange memories of her hands, cool and tender, adjusting the rag at his head. Little impressions of her in this attitude or that. The sound of her voice now and again—she was more in his thoughts than he realized. And suddenly it came over him in a flash that she was lovely. More, she was beautiful.

"And Juitori aches for her!" he snorted. "Juitori! H'm! His neck is ripe for a twisting."

For some reason he found that Juitori was the most hated man in the world, and, when he came into the fire-lit camp and walked up to the spread awning under which his father and Juitori were preparing for sleep, his smile was very dangerous.

As a rule, Moros are stingy of emotional display. Old Dato Juava showed little surprise at the approach of his son.

"So?" he said. "The tale had you dead, probably, or lost in the forest. A bad ending at yon *barrio*. But where is the wench?"

"Yes," said the bleached Juitori, "where is she?"

"Listen," Myago addressed his father. "Shall a man betray one who does him good, thus giving evil for good?"

"No. Speak out."

"Then, though I have broken my word, I have thought it well broken in that a maid goes free from a dog she loathes worse than death. She is where you will never get her, Juitori."

Juitori rose with a murderous face, and Myago laughed. "Good for your spirit!" he cried. "Step out here. I find I have at strange hunger to get at your neck!"

"You want her yourself!" screamed Juitori.

The firelight had fallen on the Creese's ebony handle as Myago moved, and Juava, cursing doubtfully at first, then gaping with widened eyes, sprang in between the two.

"Stay, stay," he commanded. "What is it you have wrapped there?"

"That? Oh, well," with a queer laugh, "I see no harm in showing it to you before I twist his neck. That," with a swift flourish, "is what a man may get who moves about and fights as becomes a man. Look at it and long!"

"The Silver Creese!" muttered his father.

A SILENCE fell on them as he took it in his hands. One after another the brown-skinned page-boys and *cushro*-bearers stole up and stood open-mouthed at this thing the old women whispered of nights by the fires. Wonder, awe, crafty longing, naked greed came out and played on their faces plain as day.

Finally Juava spoke.

"I will give you twenty ponies, son."

"No."

"Thirty, then."

Myago reached out his hand.

"It is too much for one so young," remonstrated Juava; and at this Juitori whispered in his ear.

Juava grinned wickedly.

"Thirty ponies," he declared, "or we turn you over to the Spanish."

"So?" laughed Myago. "So?" he laughed again, a dangerous laugh; dropped his rifle, whipped out his bolo in preference, and commenced.

He had no wish to kill his father, much as Juava had wronged him. Him he but tripped and knocked cold with the flat of the blade. But Juitori's head flew far in the bush, and the pack, maddened by the sight of the priceless loot, closed in with a rush. As they did so a form ran out of the woods—a girl with flying hair—and it is said she picked up a bolo and fought at his side with the fury of ten men. It was her hand that jerked the Silver Creese away from Dato Juava and held it through the fight. The fires were kicked helter-skelter, leaving but little light. Since the moon could not penetrate the foliage above, the very eagerness and the numbers of the bondsmen hampered them.

They tripped, fell, cut one another unintentionally, swore and cried out in pain and

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rage. So, in the end, though cut severely, the two who fought to one purpose gained their end and broke away into the trees, just as the Spanish patrol came running in and forced the pack to turn and fight for protection.

This the Moros, who had no trade to lose, had been longing for. They welcomed the new fight with wild yells. Since the loot was gone, they would have Christian blood. In a trice the patrol found themselves back to back, fighting for their very lives. Before the fray was done, the entire regiment had been called upon to take a hand.

But the two and the Creese who had started the row were safe hidden in Father Jacques's abode, destined to stay there until their wounds healed and a chance was afforded for Myago to get away and dispose of the blade for the boat he longed for.

Which he eventually did, to a Chinese pearl-fisher—but that is getting ahead of the story.

Said Father Jacques, when he had made sure that no one watched; "Have you found what I mentioned, my son?"

"Yes, father, I have found the richness of the heart. It is richer than the Creese, by far."

He looked at Mauna as he said this. She grew divinely ashamed, looked down and grew gladly red.

Myago trembled, and said to the Father, "Leave us for the moment, and I will call you."

WHEN the priest had gone, the youth intended bathing her wounds; but, as he looked at her, he found himself grown awkward and uncouth. For the first time in his life he felt infinitely below another person, clumsy and wordless as well. The girl, sensing this, drew near him, master for once.

It was a soft voice that said,

"No, sire. I will bind *your* cuts first. Stay—it is my wish.'

From a basin she dipped water, washing him clean, rinsing his cuts, binding and toweling him with strips sent by the priest. This man who could fight like a whirlwind of flashing death was but a babe in her hands for the time—a babe she grew very tender with, touching each wound with infinite care. But at last her soft hair touched his cheek as she bent. The touch was too much for him, and he drew breath like a man drunk.

"Mauna!"

"Yes?"

"I have found the richness I spoke of."

"But when you first awoke after San Salvador you wanted nothing but the Creese?"

"Mauna! I was but a fool—a fool of a youth who thought so well of himself no other person ever entered his head as worth considering. I—I love you. Look into my eyes and see if I speak true."

She could not look; but his lips spoke for him, close against hers.

After a time, Myago whispered, "If kissing the Cross can teach you those truths of the heart, beloved, then this Christian priest may join us, for all me."

And so, while the regiment scoured the grove for any remaining Moros, Father Jacques joined the hands of two rosy children, with the Creese placed before them as a dowry.

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THE WOOING OF THE MOCKING-BIRD

by

ROB REED McNAGNY

"WHAT is it that fella Kiplings says? 'A woman is only a woman.' Yes, and *then* some. The weaker sex runs pretty strong in spots. I been a voter goin' on thirty-three years now and yeh see where I stand." Bud Morrison waved a proud hand around the big room, which somehow bore about it an almost pathetic air of masculinity.

The room wasn't slovenly or untidy. It was *simple*—with the simplicity of bare necessities. The walls were innocent of adornment; the floors, of carpets. Cots, cooking-utensils, calf-skins; chaps, shooting-irons, saddles; all were stowed about in orderly arrangement. But everything spelled usefulness.

Over the fireplace a single large photograph caught my wandering eye. It was the one bit of decoration in the whole prospect, and I stared up at the lean, striking face of the young fellow in full dress with some curiosity.

"Far be it from me, Morrison," I ventured doubtfully, "to inaugurate my evening with the tactics that made Lot's wife trouble, but I was wondering——"

Bud caught my gaze and laughed. "That? Oh, that's th' Mocking-Bird. Most everybody asks about that."

I looked at my host suspiciously, and he laughed again.

"'Th' Mocking-Bird' was sure enough his brand around here," he assured me. "Said they called him Stevens back East, but the day he dropped in here the boys labeled him the 'Mocking-Bird' an' it stuck.

"*Say, Mister!* That lad could whistle. Not tunes exactly. I don't know's I ever heard him whistle more'n one or two regular tunes all the time he worked here. It was more like a bird-song. He'd begin with some of them soft, oily-sounding chirps, an' then drift off into trills and runs and assorted warbles until you'd swear one man couldn't be making it all. Maybe you've been South in the Spring and happened to hear a mocking-bird when it's waked up late some moonlight night? Sort of a soft, dreamy warble o' liquid sounds that kinda filters into your ear? That's how the boy whistled." Bud cocked his eye again at the picture, with a reminiscent sparkle.

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"Ever do anything in particular?" I asked idly.

My host nodded, and gave me the history of the "Mocking-Bird":

SURE did. He was jest a kid, and we couldn't use him much. But there was something so kinda shy and innocent about him, an' his whistling took hold of everybody so, I never thought o' sendin' him away. He was almost like havin' a woman around.

And he'd always whistle for yeh. At round-up time, when the punchers come riding in at night, they'd call for th' Mocking-Bird and their fodder in the same breath. An' the kid would set till nine or ten at night jest making up music for 'em. It was the kind yeh never get tired of, an' somehow he had a way o' making yeh feel jest the way he did. If he was happy—an' he most always was—the whistling would laugh at yeh all the way through. An' when he was sad or homesick it brought up that kinda choky feeling in your throat and made *you* miserable too. It was the *darnedest* thing.

BUT *tempus fugits*, as the French say, and when it gets to *fugitin'* it slips along pretty fast. Along the middle of the second season th' Mocking-Bird worked for this outfit Old Man Quimby o' the Forty-Four—next range up th' river—brings his daughter home. Eulalie had been East t' boarding-school four years, and the old man lays it down to us she was about the last word in culture and attainments. He'd been payin' for it at so much per cult, so I reckon he knew.

Eulalie was—well, it's kinda hard to find jest the word to fit Eulalie. She had eyes that scattered and *took* wherever they struck, and a contagious sort o' mouth. Her voice was a shade husky but all-fired persuasive, an' in size she was about a number two or three, or maybe a four. Any o' the fixtures and appurtenances thereto I've omitted yeh can jest count in as to match. I don't go much on these statistical descriptions anyways. It's the *toot ensemble* that usually causes heart-trouble.

Th' home-coming of Eulalie caused a social upheaval pretty much like a graft-investigation in th' senate. A fella could almost *see* the trouble gatherin'. Every puncher 'ithin fifty miles this side of th' Brazos bought a new Stetson and shoe-polish, an' it got t' be amazing how many errands there was to the Forty-Four, an' how long they took. Clothes? Yeh could see pretty nigh anything at Quimby's, from a full-dress suit down to one of them Looy Quince outfits some o' the Mexicans wear.

An' Eulalie treated 'em all alike.

"I c'n stand bein' treated like Doc Cook on his farewell tour," Moondog Williams complains to me; "an' when a fairy runs an eye over me that leaves a red spot wherever it strikes, I may perspire freely, but I knows where t' take my bleedin' affections an' *cache* 'm a whole lot. But daggone a girl w'ot plays no favor*ites!* Yeh never *do* know where yeh stand."

About all th' unbranded male population took a whirl at hypnotizin' Eulalie but th' Mocking-Bird. He was smit pretty hard too, but he was as modest about it as a prairie-dog. He didn't waste any of th' root of all evil on fixin's. Umph-um! Wasn't his way. He jest moped around for a couple o' weeks whistling, until it fairly give the outfit th' Willies t' hear him run pool on that minor register o' his. I never *seen* anything so heart-renderin'.

Along in August some time Old Man Quimby an' his daughter aforesaid dropped in one evening for a neighborly call. It was hot everywhere—that sticky, measly kind o' heat we have around here so profuse. I remember we set out in front on th' veranda for a spell, an' amuses ourselves with numerous and divers stray bits o' mixed conversation.

Talk wandered. Th' old man had winked at me solemn and cleared his throat for the third time as a hint that his system needed irrigation, when a low, mournful note arises from a point somewhere out there in the shadows. Th' Quimbys set up and looked puzzled. It was th' Mocking-Bird tuning up.

I reckon he didn't know we had company; the poor kid was jest tellin' himself his troubles in bird-talk. But it was th' melancholiest noise I ever suffered under, all full o' minors an' undernotes 'till it didn't sound hardly decent. Kinda made *me* feel choky too, though Lord knows I was used to it.

Th' old man looked at me kinda funny; th' girl jest set a-listening. While the music lasted none of us talked very much. An'

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when it finished up with a sad, unhappy little quaver, th' girl turns to me, her eyes all deep and woozy with unshed tears, an' asks what fer a critter is it?

She set right still for a long time when I tells her. It was pretty dark, an' I begin to think she was crying, till she says all at once she's got t' see th' Mocking-Bird *pronto*.

"At once, please, Mr. Bud," she says, speakin' in educated language real earnest. "I want to see this—this man—right away. Will yeh bring him to me here?"

Now I ain't fit t' run any "Advice to the Lovelorn" column in the newspapers. I reckon yeh couldn't take a quartz-crusher and extract more'n enough sentiment out o' me to make an ordinary-sized heart-throb. But somehow, when I seen th' way them two children looks at each other, I hurried th' old man inside for another drink of pain-killer.

FROM th' very start I don't know's I ever seen a more foregone conclusion than that case. It was th' whistling that caught her in the first place, and th' whistling wooed her all the way through. Soft, throaty warbles an' chirps an' runs an' trills that seemed t' nestle and kiss her. It even made an old-timer like me a little feverish to set off and listen to 'em, an' I can guess the things it told th' little girl.

Old Man Quimby was sore as a saddle-galled bronc' in round-up time when he heard how things stood.

"Morrison," he tells me, "by the bones o' th' great mickathelium I won't have it! I don't object to fowls as a article o' diet, but no —— dicky-bird is a-goin' t' marry my girl Eulalie if I c'n help it. Th' only kind of a musician I ever honed f'r is somebody who c'n make a noise like money."

"Don't yeh think you're jest a bit hard on them children?" I inquires casual. "They're only yearlin's yet."

"No, Morrison," he says very definite. "This message-o'-the-vi'let business has got t' stop. Th' maverick's all right so far as his personality goes—w'ich he ain't got any—but he ain't th' kind o' people we wanta fill up this here big country with. What we need is strong, husky *caballeros* with blood an' meat in 'em. Yeh get me? No *sir!* Much as I love my little girl, I'd disown her in a minute if she married that infernal windjammer o' yourn. Yeh can tell 'im that fer me."

But this here Mocking-Bird person had a code o' his own. Of the two lovers, he was a lot more sensible about such things, in spite o' the "culture." Love her? I reckon he was about as fond of th' little girl as a banker is of compound interest. But he jest couldn't seem t' assimilate business principles, work as he might. On a ranch he was about as useful as an educated shadder. So when th' crash come—meanin' said onnatural parent and guardeen—the little cuss jest up an' told Lalie he wouldn't never marry 'er till he had somethin' more substantial 'n a Navajo blanket and a second-hand six-gun t' start housekeeping on.

Long about this time th' census o' Ten Strike is augmented by one adult male answerin' to the name of Brickert. This Brickert *hombre* is a queer guy. In person he looks like money, his discourse is financial and diversified, and his travels had comprehended all points includin' flag-stations between Troy, New York, and San Diego. To hear him tell it, his past must-a been a cross between a railroad-folder an' a speed-limit.

Brickert's talent was in manipulatin' the parts of speech. Once well-started he give the English language no quarter an' asked none. He was as full of similes, metaphors an' schenectadies as Webster's Dictionary, a four-o'clock tea and a campaign-speech all put together, an' for clear, unbroken discourse he had the long-distance record of th' known world.

Some people's conversation grows cloying after a few hours. But Brickert would take most any old subject, wash its face an' fondle an' pet an' curry an' coax it out until yeh found your mouth a-droppin' open and your ears a-slantin' forward in spite o' yourself. Under his tongue the binomial theorum become as thrillin' a narrative as the life of th' James Boys, an' obscure portions and segments o' the Bible grew as simple and easy t' understand as th' directions on a can o' rat-poison.

No one ever *savvied* why this *hombre* come t' Ten Strike—to waste his sweetness on th' desert air, so to speak. He had plenty o' money and no visible cause for support. But after he'd glimpsed Eulalie, his reason for lingering was so obvious it made the tears come.

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Not that Lalie encouraged him, understand. She went farther th' other way than she'd ever had the heart t' go with th' home-talent entries. Somehow she jest p'intedly couldn't see this Brickert person for dust. His silvery discourse goes into the discard with his other attractions, an' Langdon P. Brickert was about as *persona non grata* as anybody ever got with Eulalie. But he had th' nerve an' hide of a armadillo. Regardless of frosts he draws cards and sets in jest as cheerful as if he'd been imported. He was so all-fired enthoosed about it she finally let him set around an' entertain the old man while she done fancy-work.

Lalie was a funny kid. She used to ride over evenings to see th' Mocking-Bird—after th' old man cussed him off th' Forty-Four—and the two would come t' me with their plans. She had a business head like her pa's, an' I guess in figgerin' up something for that boy t' do we canvassed pretty near everything from makin' mushrooms to takin' salt from sea-water. Any ordinary human she could have fitted out with a life-job in somethin' short o' five hours.

But th' Mocking-Bird was short on nerve an' nickels.

"It's no use," he used t' say mournful'. "I ain't good for an infernal thing but t' whistle, Eulalie."

And Lalie would jest make a little face at him, brush back her hair kinda nervous an' go to thinkin' again.

ONE evening after this Brickert party had become a institootion with us, so t' speak, th' girl an' Stevens come to me with their eyes a-dancin'.

"O Mr. Morrison," she squeals, draggin' me off into a corner. "We've got it—got it—*got it!*"

They joins hands an' dances around me like heathens.

"I'm afraid so," I says soothing. "When were yeh took?"

"Oh, you know what I mean," she laughed. "The *job*. I've been talking to that Mr. Brickert who comes t' see father so much——"

"Help!" I says. "If yeh can make Brickert believe that——"

"Oh, *hush!* Don't you want to hear about our good luck at all?" she queries. "I've been talking to Mr. Brickert about Jerry here, and he says why not put him on the stage?"

I looks from one t' the other in amazement.

"Think of it!" she went on, her face all flushed and sparklin'. "Here we've been planning and searching and—— But he says it can be done easily enough. He knows some managers back East who will book—I think he called it 'book'—the Mocking-Bird at a great *big* salary if he can go on the stage an' just whistle as he does for us here. They're crazy about such things in vaudeville, Mr. Brickert says.

"Oh Jerry!"— there were tears in her eyes an' voice, she was so excited—"you *must* make good. It won't be but such a little while—— And *then* I guess we'll show father!"

She dropped her arms around his neck an' kisses him.

"I know I c'n do it," chirps th' Mocking-Bird, considerable enthoosed. An' the perfectly good love-look they give each other would 'a' made a bald eagle turn green with lonesomeness.

"Poor Brickert," I says, wondering what he's goin' to get out o' it, and feelin' sorta sorry for 'im.

"I think you're jest terrible, Bud Morrison!" Lalie flashes at me, but I could see she's flushed up red and warm with what she's done. "I jest *asked* him about it. And he offered to, anyway. Oh, isn't it simply glorious th' way things are coming out!"

I reckon that fella Kiplings—or Keplinger, or whatever his name was—was right about the feminine gender. Yeh can't run any regular brand on to 'em deep enough t' keep some other jasper from doctorin' it up into something else. That's how I read th' tracks, anyways.

But to resume. The Mocking-Bird heads East as per plans and specifications, and it was a year before I seen him again. An' he's made good. They tell me they've went plumb *loco* over his whistlin' stunt in vaudeville.

After he left I didn't get to see so much of Lalie any more. The Brickert *hombre* stays on, o' course, promotin' the English language an' acting as hero of most of his person'lly conducted narratives. And it seems to take, with th' Mocking-Bird outa the way. Before Spring it looked like a good bet whether she'd stick t' the prodigal

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in furrein climes or take a chance on the parts of speech. But I jest looked wise an' said nothing. Y' see, somehow I couldn't quite forget that look in her eyes the night they told me he was goin' away.

AN' THEN her *protegy* come rompin' back like I said, looking slicker an' flossier than a yearling at Fall round-up. Said he was playin' time on the Coast Circuit and has some open dates, so he drops down.

Painted scenery and a spotlight had done wonders for th' Mocking-Bird. He smoked cigarettes just the same, an' that was about all yeh could recognize in him. The lost-dog expression was gone, his face had took on weight, his hair was parted real sporty an' he talked easy and familiar about "Janes" an' "champagany-suppers," an' other furrein and deleterious substances not covered in the Pure-Food laws of Arizona.

But th' differentest thing of all was the bunch o' little pink letters that come every time Moondog Williams brung up the mail from Ten Strike. The' must ha' been anyway one fer every day.

Th' boys got mighty curious about all that mail comin' in fer the Mocking-Bird, and when they sees the photograft he had in his room they grows plumb excited. The pitcher showed a nice-appearin' young woman that looked about two-thirds angel —she hadn't no wings, but she wore about as much clothes as one—an' down acrost one corner in a square sort of hand was wrote, "Yours without a struggle, Mauretania D'Arcy, of the D'Arcy Trio."

Course I hadn't nothin' to say, but I did a heap o' thinkin' them first few days; an' I don't know's I *liked* all the improvements in th' Mocking-Bird. He asks once about Eulalie kinda embarrassed; but after that he gets pretty interested in the pink letters, an' I noticed he never tries any white-flag work with Old Man Quimby. I tell yeh I got t' wonderin' a whole lot jest where the little girl was comin' out of it all.

For Lalie was actin' funny too. She never come over without the Brickert chap lingerin' somewhere in the near distance. Seemed like she couldn't lose that *hombre*, and you couldn't notice that she tried very hard. An' she didn't pass out much chin-music to the Mocking-Bird neither, leavin' it mostly to the Talk-Expert an' carefully laughin' at all his jokes. No *sir*, I didn' like the way the signs read a-tall.

And another thing; the Mocking-Bird didn' whistle any more. Before, he'd always been willing to perform most any old time you'd listen. But now he was about as reckless as that fella in the Bible was with *his* one talent, hidin' it under a bushel —like the story goes—and side-steppin' exhibition-work. It sorta peeved the boys, an' even Lalie remarks about it.

But th' Mocking-Bird only laughs an' says he wants to get away from his meal-ticket for a little while. She didn't ask him again after that.

Things sorta all drawed to a focus at once, that last week. Th' Mocking-Bird kep' a-gettin' more of his pink letters, the boys kep' a-gettin' sorer about th' whistling an' Eulalie kep' spendin' more time with Brickert—none of which does anybody else much good. I had my weather eye out fer mutiny, when Spanish Ed come to me, as emissary for th' gang, with a proposition.

"Yeh know, Ol' Timer," Ed begins, "that it ain't fittin' that th' stranger within our gates goes forth without due honors an' feastin' an' sounds of ribaldry by night. Ye're also pre*soom*ably conscious," he adds, as th' Mocking-Bird strolls up, "that said snake has acted in an ornery an' pizen manner t'ords us, his former friends, wherefore he oughta be shot at sunrise on th' nearest hill. But whereas our hearts are soft within us on this toomultuous occasion —an' hills is consid'able scarce in this bailiwick—it is hereby unanimously agreed that we, the punchers o' th' Crippled O, do bind ourselves to give, assign, set over an' otherwise come through with, a bang-up, full-dress *rodeo* in honor of said second contractin'-party."

"Applause, applause!" chuckles th' Mocking-Bird.

But Spanish Ed never batted an eyelash, an' goes on.

"Pro*vid*ed—an' I'm playin' it straight across, gents—*provided:* that said Eugene J. Stevens, better known as 'the kid at Morrison's,' 'th' dicky-bird,' et cetry, does on said an' such occasion—*whistle*." He finishes up solemn as a bat.

Th' Mocking-Bird studies a minute an' says he would. An' somehow he antes so cheerful I made him out less'n ever. But the *fiesta* begins right there. Every mem-

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ber of the different sex within fifty miles was notified, an' Moondog Williams started north at noon t' corral an outfit o' niggers up Tucson way that was reported t' make a noise similar to Heaven.

IT SURE was plumb swell, that orgy. I reckon the *cholo* orchestra sorta strained theirselves that night, for I never did hear such music. An' clothes? Say! Th' Mocking-Bird an' Brickert was th' only ones in waiters' uniform, but I guess Solomon an' all his glories hadn't nothing on that there layout.

Lalie and the Talking Sharp trails in late an' polite after the milling in the front room commences. There was a new light an' dance in the little woman's eyes when I met 'em; and as her little hands laid in my big one fer a minute I caught th' sparkle of a diamond on her ring-finger. It kinda hit me all in the wind, so t' speak, and when I looked up an' seen the grin on Brickert—— Well, I was for makin' a break fer the open air and cussin'-room. But she headed me.

"Bud, we've been friends so long," she says, kinda soft and wistful-like, "couldn't you—aren't you going to congratulate me, Bud?"

"On that?" I chokes, indicatin' the Word-Man, who'd moved on ahead.

She nodded, starry-eyed. "Oh, Bud, I know you don't like him, but you've never tried to get acquainted. And I love him—understand? He's been the dearest, best——"

"You'll have t' excuse me," I mumbles, thinking of that other man she'd sworn by, jest a little over a year ago, "but I hear that Kiefer outfit arrivin' an' I've jest p'intedly got to tend to them hosses. But *you'll* always have my best wishes, Lalie."

An' I beat it fer the corral.

It was some later—when the fun begins to get fast an' furious—that they calls on th' Mocking-Bird to show goods an' twitter a little. I was settin' in the shadder way up on the east end o' the veranda when they breaks loose.

I reckon I'd set there a right smart while a-wonderin' an' a-lookin' off into th' soft blackness of th' night, when somebody slides along the veranda and drops down in a chair beside me. It was dark so th' newcomer couldn' see me, an' I was jest going t' speak, when the crowd inside storms th' Mocking-Bird like I said.

At th' first clear birdy chirp, my shadder opposite begun to stiffen up an' take notice. And then th' notes warbles off into one of the old, familiar, tuneless songs we used to love, an' I forgot about th' other in the spell of it.

I told yeh, didn't I, how th' boy could make yeh *feel* things when he wanted to? That night—*ahol* It was wonderful. At first th' liquid stampede of sound sorta rambled and grazed around like a herd o' feedin' beef-critters. An' then it seemed t' grow happier an' gay, until yeh couldn' think of nothing in the world but a young girl dancin' out her very soul for joy. But at th' last it kinda died down again to a minor key, soft an' low and endlessly mournful. As it streamed on, yeh could feel th' shattered dreams an' hopes an' despairs of all the centuries in th' pitchers that there music conjured up.

I don't know how long it lasted; maybe ten minutes, maybe longer—don't ask me. I hadn't hardly realized it'd stopped until I heard a kind o' a smothered choky sob there beside me an' recollects my shadder. It was so plumb mournful an' miserable an' lonesome—an' right then I wasn't so overly sure o' my own e-motions—that I jest naturally sneaks over the railin' an' round th' corner o' the shack to th' corrals. That was the darnedest evening!

It was gettin' late before I come round to the front again. Th' moon—a big red ball of sentimental hysterics—was jest slippin' into view over the sand-hills to th' East, an' all around things was so bright yeh could see a coyote pickin' 'is teeth forty yards up the trail. I had took off my spurs an' chaps for social reasons, an' I reckon I didn't make overly much noise turnin' that corner, but it wouldn't ha' interrupted anything if I had.

"What in — what——" I says, when I could get my breath enough t' say anything at all. "Ex*cuse* me!"

"Don't mention it," says th' Mocking-Bird, unhookin' hisself from something he seemed t' be stranglin', an' looking up. While I stood there stammerin', the girl in his arms struggles a little an' then looks up too. And blame me! if it wasn't Lalie, all rosy with blushes an' her eyes kinda misty an' wonderful. Why is it, stranger, a woman always cries at such a time?

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"Excuse *me* fer interruptin' the obsequies," I starts off again, fighting for wind an' tryin' t' get my bearings.

"You said that before," chirps th' Mocking-Bird sarcastic.

I was so plumb beat I jest couldn' think *what* t' say for a minute, an' then I leans over and lifts up Lalie's left hand. The diamond was gone.

I turns around very polite to my former hoss-wrangler. "Mr. Stevens," I says sternly—it was the only time I ever called him by his right handle—"there's only one thing," I says. "What about them pink *billy doos* an' th' lady with th' Garden o' Eden wardrobe?"

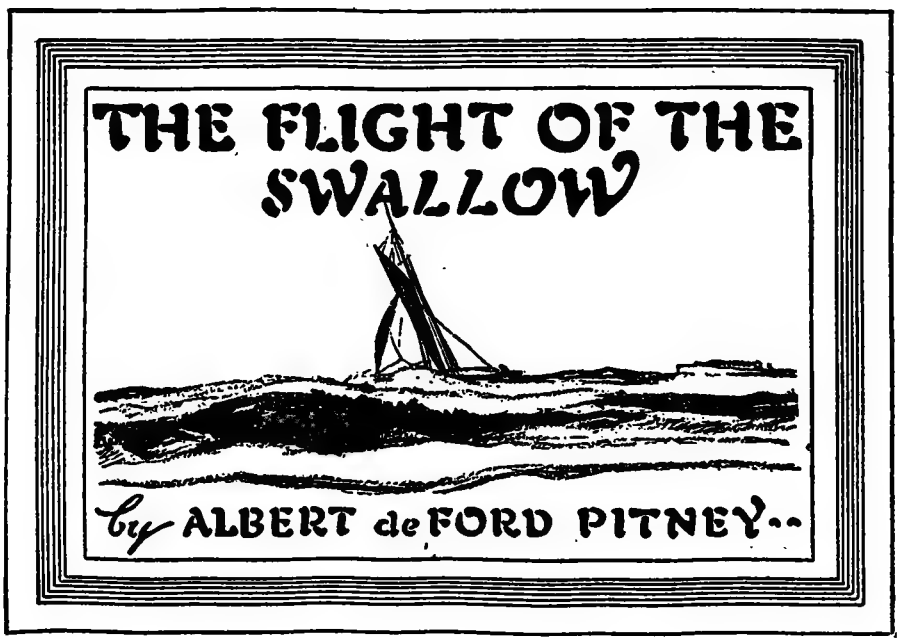
Th' Mocking-Bird jest reached down in his pocket an' fishes up a bunch of them little daily letters. He passes 'em across to me with a grin.

Th' first one was a blank. So was th' next one. An' th' next! When I looked up at him again he was a-settin' there chuckling.

"You know I haven't been traveling for m' health, Bud," he laughs. "I've learnt a good many things they don't teach a fella out on the range. I found that girl's pitcher in a dressing-room in San Francisco."

I stood a-lookin' an' a-lookin' at them two children, huddled close, like calves in a brandin'-pen, an' thinkin' what a heap o' worry they'd both give me, an' what a queer critter a woman is anyhow. An' then, all of a sudden it occurs to me how plumb fluttery an' happy I was.

"Young man," I says, mighty serious, "it's a darn' good thing you c'n whistle!"



"THERE she is, the big black thief."

"She's got our last chance this year inside her."

The wrecker, at anchor, shouldered into the rising seas, her chain hawser clamoring in the pipes as she swung, her mastheads cutting a wide arc across the stormy sky. One blue-clad figure on the bridge looked down at the fleeting sloop, blowing past in a squall. The solitary watcher leaning on the bridge rail seemed to look from his distance down on the sloop with motionless, profound indifference. The security of his position on the massive structure was in itself almost an insult to the two men on the dancing and leaping deck.

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"Which one of the sneaking hounds was that?"

"That was that big, ginger-whiskered second mate," replied Joe Nobles.

"If he's in charge it's easy."

Ben Nobles grasped the spokes with two huge mittens, like rolls of red flannel. He was so tall he had to crouch to hold the *Swallow's* wheel. His cracked old oilskin jacket, glistening with spray and sleet, strained in wrinkles around his rugged trunk. He wore a bushy, grizzled mustache that matched his eyebrows. His bony jaw and leathery neck were black with unshorn beard.

"This here's too much like piracy to suit my stomach, Ben," Joe shouted.

"Maybe it 'd suit yer stomach better to hev nothin' to put in it," replied his brother sardonically. "Or mebbe ye want to ship before the mast? Ye can't get a job as a farm-hand now, because it's Winter."

"I guess ye'r right. We got to do it." Joe's black brows came together. "Well then, let them that gets in the way look out."

"Now ye'r talkin'. I guess they wouldn't make much of a show in court if we take nothin' but what belongs to us. I want the stuff we salved ourselves and brought ashore. And I'm goin' to hev it and be paid salvage on it. I'm a master-mariner and I can't be robbed like a beach-comber. Stand by yer head-sheet; here's a flaw."

BEN gave the sloop a spoke of weather-helm and she slid ahead of a sea that raced up under her counter. The *Swallow* steered so sweetly that a touch of the helm was enough for her. She did not have to drag a rudder crosswise through the water. She was flush-decked, sharp forward, but deep and beamy; a sea-boat and a sail-carrier. Yachtsmen admired her rig and lines. They admired them more when she slipped by them on the wind like the *Flying Dutchman*, or, going free, came up before the breeze like a cloud.

To-day the *Swallow* was light. She needed weight in her hold. She stooped and ducked and glanced away as the gusts struck her. But she never was knocked down or tossed to leeward. She laid over and dipped her rail, but the puffs shot her straight ahead. She was the only vessel moving on the storm-lashed harbor. Her bow was pointed for a break in the islands that showed dead ahead between rain-squalls. The surf showed bursting outside the gap and the inlet was white, like a patch of snow. The wrecker was a mere small blur, far astern.

The sloop came up into the wind, her foresail whipping viciously. A wave slapped her, sending a burst of spray across her deck. Another, springing up on the other side, poured a hogshead of foam over the rail. The *Swallow* had brought up among the chops and cross-rips at the inner end of Smoke Island inlet.

"I don't think there's no boat around here would want to follow us out through there to-night," Ben called. He had to shout to make his brother hear him above the noise of wind and water. "She'll be fierce to-night."

He pointed to where a string of icicles glittered on the sloop's forestay. The men's bronzed faces were streaming with the salt spray borne on the wind as they balanced themselves on the reeling deck of the sloop and stared away to seaward. The wind blew through the *Swallow's* rigging with a steady, fierce scream that carried the din of the clashing surges and the boom of the surf outside.

Ben put the helm up and the *Swallow* started for her home mooring. A long stretch of boom with the reefed sail rolled down on it projected over the *Swallow's* quarter and dragged at the sheet as the wind piled into the big sail. She held her course for the distant anchorage off the town, as steadily as a steamer. Ben kept her boiling full, luffing barely a trifle in the fiercest gusts, and she dropped the inlet over her stern like a racing yacht.

"We'll show them thieves t'-night what the *Swallow* can do," shouted Ben.

THE Nobles brothers' grievance was this. The *Pleiad*, a small tramp freighter, had gone ashore off Smoke Island and the brothers had at once applied for the job of salving her. They had arranged for tugs and lighters and had got some of the cargo ashore themselves in the *Swallow* when the Hanks Wrecking Company stepped in and snapped up the commission. They took possession of the stuff the brothers had landed, without saying "thank you" and gave no heed to their protests. The officers of the

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Pleiad were with the brothers, but the underwriters were in charge, and that settled it. The Nobles were raging. They had lived all their lives in the little bay town and were respected men. Ben held a first-class master's-certificate. They were poor, but in the tiny port all were poor together, and it was a new thing to them to be shoved out of the way with contempt.

"There goes a boat ashore. Hold ye'r luff, don't go near 'em." Joe stooped to look beneath the boom at a boat leaving the wrecker. "There's six men in her."

"And the tender's ashore with both the Hankses and the Captain and the first officer. There's luck for ye! We'll pay our call at four bells." Ben shot the *Swallow* up into the wind.

JIM HAY and Pete Dominic, respectively foremast-hand and cook of the *Day Star*, were smoking a comfortable pipe in the galley when the door swung open, admitting two big men in dripping oilers. "Git out," ordered the "doctor," thinking they were members of the wrecker's crew. Hay looked around. His jaw dropped as he saw Ben's savage face bending over him. "H-w'at-t the——" he began and leaped to his feet, his fist ready. Hay got no further, because a twenty-four-inch belaying-pin rang on his skull with a mellow note and he crumpled where he stood. Ben stepped over Hay, the pin ready for another blow.

"No! No! Nem' mine, I'll quit," protested the "doctor," trying to back away.

"Come away from them knives, you. 'Gee!' " ordered Ben.

"No. No knives. Nothing like that at all, Cap'n," assured Dominic. Ben caught him by the wrist and twisted him to the floor. Hay lay motionless, but the brothers thought it best to lash his wrists and ankles as well as the cook's.

"Shall I gag ye, or cave yer head in?" said Ben, stooping over Dominic, belaying-pin in hand.

"I won't yell. I won't make a move, Cap'n. Don't do nothing to me. I'm all right," urged Dominic.

"Who else is on board?" demanded Ben.

"De second officer and de chief engineer in de cabin," replied Dominic politely. "Don't hit me and I won't make a move, Cap'n, so help me!"

Quick was the fate that fell upon Mr. Pride, the second officer, and Mr. Ferguson, the chief. They found themselves trussed up and bundled into the fo'c'sle before they realized what was happening. Mr. Pride was a big man and a prideful, as became his name and station. He and Ben broke two chairs, and one or the other of them put his elbow through a door-panel. Ferguson surrendered cannily at discretion to the black-browed Joe.

"Come on now, Ben, let's hurry and get the stuff broken out." Joe was on needles when the tussle was over.

"Enjoy yerself," counseled Ben. "This may be the only burglarin' ye'll ever do."

The wrecker's deck was piled with the *Pleiad's* gear, lashed fast. The hatches were secured ready for sailing. With handspikes they knocked away the battens, then clapped on a tackle to drag away the forward hatch. Ben went below to look for the cases that he claimed. Joe sweated, clearing a cargo-derrick and rigging the fall. He worked with his chin on his shoulder, in fear of being boarded by the legitimate masters of the vessel. He was younger than Ben by ten years, and, by that much, more hopeful. His chagrin at the loss of the contract was less than Ben's.

Ben was long in the hold, searching, by the light of the ship's occasional electric bulbs, among the *Pleiad's* heterogeny for the goods he had handled. He found enough of them at length to start work.

"Lower me a strop," he called from below. "Is the hatch off the sloop?"

"Long ago. Fer —— sake hurry."

The block came down with a run. Ben did not remind Joe that he was doing the work of two men in the hold. Methodically he sent up case after case and then plunged forward again, looking for another. On deck, in the storm and cold, Joe performed prodigies. He got the stuff aboard the *Swallow* and was back with half his body down the hatch, imploring Ben to end his search.

"Come away, Ben. I swear I see a light coming—Ahoy-y! Shore boat alongside—Tumble up below there."

Ben ascended reluctantly by way of the iron ladder. His gaunt, ferocious features and huge frame were like those of a caveman coming forth to do battle, as he rose into view from the dark opening. Inspection of the rich cargo had renewed his anger. He shook his head as he glanced

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over the stern and saw only storm and darkness. He was the last to leave the wrecker. He seemed to linger, his big shoulders and fierce countenance lowering over the rail before he dropped to the *Swallow's* deck.

"Get the hatch on. Get the hatch on," ordered Joe. "Look what's overhauling us!"

This time there was reason. Now faintly glimmering, now lost, now appearing again, a bobbing light had made its appearance off to leeward. The brothers cast off and leaped to the halyards. The big sail filled and the *Swallow* melted into the night like a shadow.

"Just in time. Easy enough so far," said Joe excitedly, peering over the stern.

"Yes." Ben took off a mitten to wipe the sweat from his face with the back of his hand. "Easy enough so far. But it come to me when I saw that light what a risk we was runnin'. I don't know what I got ye into, Joe. You're younger than me an' I ought to think for ye. Suppose we can't make this look right to the owners?"

"We'll put the stuff in bond and get a lawyer." Joe was a quicker thinker on such matters than Ben. "We'll get that rich fellow that wanted to buy the *Swallow* for a yacht."

"Ye've got a head on ye, Joe. Better get below now and get out the trysail ready to bend on. We'll need it, most like, when we get outside."

THE *Swallow* had scarcely made her offing when the wrecker's tender came into sight of the steamer. This was a full-decked power-launch with cabin, engine-room and everything pertaining to a stanch little cruiser. She carried two hands and had aboard old John Hanks, head of the Hanks Wrecking Company, who had taken the fancy personally to superintend the salving of the *Pleiad*, young John Hanks who was making the trip with his father for a lark during a little vacation from his university, and Mr. Payne, the first officer of the wrecker, also the pilot Tom Morey, a Smoke Island man.

The motor-launch came hustling up after a tough battle across the stormy bay. The steamer's lights flickered through the drifting vapor, and the men on the boat could see the cabin-door unlatched and flapping to and fro as the vessel rolled.

Mr. Payne shot out his arm. "Look at that!" he cried.

The forward cargo-derrick was lowered and was swinging from side to side, dragging its block across the deck. The black chasm of the hatch was visible as the motor-boat rode up on a wave. Not a man could be seen on the wrecker.

Mr. Payne leaped for the rail as the launch closed in, and the Hanks, father and son, scrambled after him.

The story of the piracy was soon told and old Hanks grew apoplectic with rage.

"Where was Captain Graves all this time? Where was he? He'll never command another ship of mine. He'll never put foot on this bridge again," he shouted. He ran to the rail. "The launch!" he yelled. "You know this harbor. Can any boat get out of here to-night?"

"I don't see as how they could," Morey replied, after a moment's consideration.

"Did you see any boat as we came out?"

"No vessel," was the indifferent response.

Tom Morey was a patriotic Smoke Islander and a partisan of the Nobles in the salvage dispute.

"We got 'em then. They're between us and the inlet! They can't get away! Come on."

Hanks hurled himself into the boat and was followed by his son and Payne. "You see if you can't keep awake and keep your weather eye lifting from this out, Mr. Pride," he shouted over his shoulder. "Cast off, there. Full speed. Pull her wide open."

Young Hanks turned on the search-light and swung the beam of it ahead. Its broad white ray was seen by the Nobles as, far away toward the bight, the sloop rushed to get her clearance for a straight reach through the inlet.

"Here they come," shouted Joe, to make Ben hear him above the roaring wind. "We can handle 'em. Let 'em try to board us that's all."

"Let 'em try to follow the *Swallow* into the inlet!" bellowed big Ben. "Let 'em go where the *Swallow* goes!"

The force of the wind astonished young John Hanks when he stuck his head above the cabin roof. The helmsman was holding his course by the lighthouse at the mouth of the inlet. Nothing else could be seen ahead but the white crests of the rollers leaping out of the murk as the launch tore

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into them. The man at the wheel stood at his post, swaying on his hips to the motion of the vessel, his hard, weather-beaten face fixed rigidly ahead. He was little older than John, but in him the plump freshness of youth had been beaten down by the sea into hard muscle and big bone. He was clad in oilskins, which were blown flat against his chest and shoulders by the wind. His knobby wrists as he grasped the spokes looked cold and wet and as little like warm flesh and blood as a wave-washed rock in an icy sea.

THE wrecker's launch was taking the short seas on her port bow. The wind was whipping off the crests, and spray in solid sheets raked her from hawse to transom at every plunge. She was holding a straight course for the mouth of the inlet, sweeping the harbor with her search-light from port to starboard as she ran.

The sloop had yet to make enough distance on the starboard tack to have a straight reach through the channel. Ben Nobles was the most skilful fore-and-aft sailor along that coast. He held the wheel, nursing every fraction of a point of speed. Laid over until the water boiled along her rail, the *Swallow* rushed across the seas.

"Go on, you *Swallow*. Go on, you bully gal," cried Ben. "Show 'em the way. Show 'em the way, the same as you always do!"

It was time for the sloop to go about. Feeling the wind on her best point of sailing, she darted for the entrance to the seething channel. The launch was broad off her starboard beam at the opposite side of the neck, and it was evident that they must come together at the opening. The *Swallow*, her reefed mainsail and jib hard as boiler iron, tore across the rollers like a race-horse. Her cargo stiffened her just enough, and in point of speed on this tack she asked nothing of the swift motor-boat. The launch, somewhat sheltered by the land, was making good weather of it. The men aboard, all strung to the excitement of the chase, were in the cockpit, straining their eyes to be the first to sight the quarry. John Hanks at the search-light was slowly sweeping the rolling crests to port and all the men followed the ray with their eyes, intent as hunters.

"There she is!" came the loud cry as the beam caught a glint of white above the combing water.

"We've got her right on the land. No man will dare to try the inlet to-night!" shouted Hanks. "Run down on her."

Tom Morey rolled the wheel, and the motor-boat, changing her course, darted out from the shelter of the cape. Hanks was stamping with excitement. He shoved John away from the search-light and with his own hand held the ray on the sail. "Give her speed now," he yelled. "Hold her as she is. Put me right alongside of her."

The other vessel could be seen plainly in the wide circle of light, even to her iron-hard standing rigging and the soapy lather that spun from her glistening side as she rolled and showed her copper.

"It's Ben Nobles' sloop, by the Lord Harry!" shouted Tom Morey to his mate. "And they're goin' fer the inlet as straight as destruction!"

He changed his course, and the motor-boat fell off from the chase. Hanks shot out his hand to turn the motor-boat after the escaping sloop. Morey held it hard against him.

"It's sure death in that channel!" he cried.

"Go after them," yelled Hanks. "Ain't ye man enough to go after them? Then get away from the wheel!"

"It's death to every man of us," yelled Morey in response. Loud as they shouted in each other's ears, the others in the cockpit could not make out their words.

"Give me the wheel then," cried Hanks. "I'm no skulker."

Morey had craned his neck to catch the words. At "skulker" he clenched his fist and glared at Hanks.

"No skulker, be you!" he shouted. "I'll show you who's a skulker. No man can call me that."

"Will you obey orders?" screamed Hanks. "Will you obey orders? Don't you forget who I am."

"Here goes, then," bawled Morey, pointing the boat for the center of the channel. "Every——one of ye will be fish-bait for yer orders!"

THE launch rose high on the first big surge swirling at the channel's mouth, and with a staggering rush dived into the next, the screw racing madly

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as it was flung clear of the water. A green sea rolled over her from bow to stern, burying her completely, but the stanch little hull was tight and she was free in a moment and plowed ahead. Her whaleboat-bow and strong-timbered deck had brought her through. All but the helmsman had been beaten down by the tons of sea that had washed over her. No water had entered the hull, however, and in the momentary respite the self-bailing cockpit partly freed itself, and the launch rushed on.

What she had to encounter was not a succession of steep rollers, but a clash of battling waves that surged together from all directions. It would instantly be fatal to swerve from a straight course and run on the shallows, and only blind instinct could hold a course amid the spray, which hid the sky. The cold was such that ice began to form in the waterways. Saturated, frozen, blinded, battered and deafened beyond comprehension, all the men but Morey huddled in the bottom of the cockpit, scarcely knowing whether they were still afloat, or pounding along the bottom.

The launch was half-way through the inlet, still free of water and under command. Old Hanks, from where he was hugging the cabin-bulkhead, got his eyes free of water and looked about him. His son and Payne were beside him, blue-lipped and shaking. Above them crouched the helmsman, his straining face above the deck intent on keeping the launch headed into the very center of the turmoil, where there would be water under her keel. The motor-boat's deck had been swept clean as a hound's tooth. Anchor-davit, side lights, boat chocks, ventilator—all had been shaved off by the green seas she had shipped.

They were nearing open water. Morey, at the wheel, felt the steady set of the long rollers taking the place of the leaping confusion of the inlet. From the left a deep sound, steadily growing on their ears, gradually dominated the shriek of wind and dash of meeting waters. The engine still beat its sturdy rhythm and drove the little boat hardily ahead. Morey scanned without ceasing the water to port and starboard for fragments of wreckage or struggling men, for he looked for the sloop to be caught aback among the whirlpools and driven under.

The launch had suffered. There was water in her. She must have smashed a port forward and, unless she could be cleared of water and the leak stopped, she soon would become a wreck. Under full power and command and riding stanchly, it might have been possible for a first-class seaman to take advantage of a "smooth" and get her headed back, but Tom Morey knew in his heart that their case was desperate.

They were getting out now. The yacht rose to dizzy heights and wallowed down and rose again. The great black rollers, topped with foam, raced in, and now, on their left, with appalling nearness, arose the heart-shaking thunder of the surf among the boulders, overpowering every other sound and filling their hearts with dread. For the first time Hanks realized the desperate folly of their attempt.

The engineer struggled up beside Morey. "She's half full of water," he called in Morey's ear. "Two ports is busted for'ard on the sta'bo'rd side. I stuffed a couple of blankets into 'em. I'm skeered some of her seams is opened. Kin we make Stanwich?"

"Not right-side-up. We got to look for a smooth, and git back before she starts a butt. Look after yer engine."

The man started to drop below again, but as his right hand fell on the coaming and his left grasped the knob of the door he saw something that made him turn and cry to the other sailor:

"Look, Tom," he yelled. "The sloop!"

It was true. Not twenty fathoms off their starboard bow the *Swallow* was sailing. She was making splendid weather of it, riding the waves like a duck and bursting through their crests in showers of foam that blew away from her like puffs of smoke. But for their own perilous position they might have looked long at the gallant spectacle the little ship made.

The motor-boat was in a perilous position indeed. She was neither designed nor fitted for outside work in Winter weather. The big, heavy-timbered sloop, handled by two consummate sailors, might fare through all right, but neither the launch's frames nor engines should have been called upon to withstand the pounding of a November gale. It was blowing a storm of wind, the sea was in fury, and under their lee was the clamor of the surf on Rocky Point.

"Git below and tend your engines, Jim," called Morey. "If she stops we're dead men."

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Jim withdrew his eyes from the sloop and turned the knob of the door. As he did so there was a broad flash in the cabin and the door burst out against him, throwing him on his back in the cockpit. The launch staggered, her lights went out and she fell off broadside in the trough. A yell of terror broke from the men, one that could be heard even above the gale, and reached the ears of Ben and Joe aboard the sloop.

THE Nobles brothers had been too fully occupied with the handling of their vessel to note the nearness of the motor-boat. They had little thought that she would attempt to follow them. Lying low in the water, the little launch would have been hard to make out in the storm, even if they had been looking for her. The flash of the explosion that disabled her they saw, however, and a second later they heard the detonation. Faint and plaintive, borne to their ears against the gale, followed the last cry of her crew.

"My —— Ben, she's come out and blowed up right on the rocks!" screamed Joe.

"Cast off that sheet and stand by!" roared Ben.

The big man ground his wheel a-weather, with the strength of a giant. The sloop paid off instantly and, with the wind directly over her stern fairly lifting her from the water, she raced down on the sinking launch. Joe ran forward and cast off the jib-sheet, all but one turn. Holding on by the sheet, he crouched in the eyes of the sloop, scanning the water ahead. They were dashing with the speed of the wind, dead on the breakers, but neither man faltered for the flicker of an eyelash.

Joe's leather-lunged shout came at last. "Hard a-starboard!"

The sloop rounded to in the trough, her sail flapping thunderously. Joe let fly the jib-sheet and lunged with his boat-hook. With a heavy crash the *Swallow* settled broadside to broadside with the sinking yacht. Joe reached across the motor-boat with his boat-hook and sunk it into her side, arching his back with the strain of holding the two together. Ben leaned over and gripped the coaming of the yacht's cockpit with his huge hand.

"Pitch 'em aboard, Tom Morey," he yelled.

"Jump, Father," cried John.

"I leave last," answered Hanks sternly.

Without more words Payne thrust John over the side and followed after him, Ben Nobles grasping each with his free hand and thrusting them into the cabin of the sloop. The sailors followed. The motor-boat was wallowing deep, and Morey had to spring up to catch the rail of the sloop. Hanks started, on Morey's heels, but his chilled limbs refused to bear him and before he could gather himself to leap and catch the hand that Ben held out the yacht rolled over away from the sloop and sank beneath him. The boat-hook was torn from Joe's grasp and he saw Hanks go down.

Joe Nobles cleared the space between the sloop's bow and quarter in three strides. He saw a white head drifting astern and, without a check, he launched himself after it. Joe was a mighty swimmer.

He had the old man in two strokes. A line thrown by Ben fell across his arms. Joe caught it and Ben hauled both men in over the counter. Tom Morey dragged them to the companionway and passed them to the men below, then leaped to Ben's side.

All the men were aboard the *Swallow*, but it seemed as if that were only a momentary respite. The sloop, but for a miracle, was lost.

Thirty fathoms from them a monstrous black shape reared itself amid the smother. Others were behind it. They were the rocks, and on them the sea beat with indescribable uproar.

"Get an anchor over. Stand by to cut the hawser," Ben ordered.

Morey sprang to obey. The *Swallow* jerked head to the seas as the anchor fell. Ben raised his arm, Morey slashed through the hawser with his sheath-knife and the *Swallow*, falling off, caught the wind in her mainsail and sped to starboard like a doubling hare.

Ben put his strength on the wheel, while Morey knelt by the sheet. The *Swallow* rolled rail-under in the trough, burst through the crest, slid down the long slope and climbed the next wave in a gallant effort, like a living thing. For a moment it looked as if she would make it. But the breakers were too huge. She lost way in the hollows. No vessel under sail could do what was asked of her.

"Let go the other anchor when I throw her head up," shouted Ben.

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"All clear," answered Morey. Ben put the helm down, the *Swallow* answered, the anchor brought her up with a jerk and then she began to drag sickeningly.

Ben turned and, sweeping the brine out of his eyes, scanned the wall of rocks. The *Swallow* was lurching back toward the point with every surge. The enormous green seas were breaking right under her lee and, as each roller lifted her, she lunged against her anchor and dragged half her length. The new hawser held for the moment but Morey fearfully expected it to part at every jerk.

Ben turned from his survey of the bursting breakers, a survey that had been as calm and thoughtful as if it had been made in a summer breeze. Through the whirl of spray that half blotted out the hull of the sloop and then blew aside and revealed her, laboring on the side of some mountain of water, Ben's huge figure loomed, indomitable as the rocks themselves. The man's iron hardihood communicated itself to Morey, who crouched ready to spring to his command.

"Haul in the boom and get a couple of gaskets around the mainsail, quick as ——," Ben ordered. "Then get forward and stand by to get the jib on her. Cut when I raise my arm and then get that jib like lightning."

Ben had to yell at the top of his brazen lungs to make Morey hear. He jumped to help the man furl the mainsail and then leaped back to the wheel. Morey clawed his way forward and cleared the jib. Ben saw him draw his sheath-knife as he crouched, clinging by the bitts.

A breaker, combing further out than usual, fell full upon the *Swallow*, burying her deep in foam and solid water. She freed herself gallantly and rode, climbing higher and higher up the next towering onrush. She had not a rag of canvas showing.

As the *Swallow* mounted the great sea, her bow caught the wind. Ben raised his arm and Tom cut and leaped to the jib-halyards. So swift was he that he got a point of sail up as the sloop showed on the crest. The blast filled the jib and blew the sloop around as if she had been pivoted and she dashed directly on the rocks. The sight was too much for Morey. He knelt by the mast with his arm before his eyes.

It was well for the men that Ben Nobles was at the wheel. It was a desperate chance that he was taking, but not a wild one. He knew exactly what he was trying to do. One rock right before him, with a towering pinnacle of splintered granite, was not unlike a church. This was Ben's mark. Between it and the next rock was deep water. Ben shot the *Swallow* for the gap —and she made it!

A black monolith loomed dead ahead. Ben ground the wheel to starboard and she cleared it. Her bottom scraped and her rail touched, with a jar that shook her from masthead to keelson, but she got by.

Another seething mill-race poured between two rocks to port. Ben steered through that—and the sloop was in the inlet. Ben knew the channel as he did the *Swallow's* deck. He called on Morey to get the mainsail and, as the sloop cut through the last whirl of the inlet, the mainsail rose and the sloop squared away for the port.

"YOU might turn the watch to, Mr. Pride, and have that deck brightened up," suggested Captain Ben Nobles to his second officer, as the *Day Star* got under way.

"I'll do it, sir," replied Mr. Pride.

With a glance at his owner, who was smoking a cigar at the leeward end of the bridge, he descended the ladder. Captain Nobles shoved his hands into the pockets of his coat and looked up and down the length of his vessel. He had taken charge the day after his piracy, vice Captain Graves, and he was determined to make a smart ship of her.

"This looks like an able packet," he said to Joe, who was making the run up to New York, where he was to have command of a seagoing tug belonging to the wrecking-fleet.

But Joe waved his hand toward the white line of beach. The *Day Star* was steaming down the harbor toward the inlet, now a placid sheet of water. Joe's gesture indicated an oyster-sloop hauled out for the Winter. Her topmast was on her deck and her canvas and gear were below. The blocks and timbers that shored her up on the sand could not conceal her fine lines, and Joe's eye glistened as he looked at her.

"This is a first-class steamer, all right," he said, "but don't you forget it, there's the best little ship you or me will ever have under us!"

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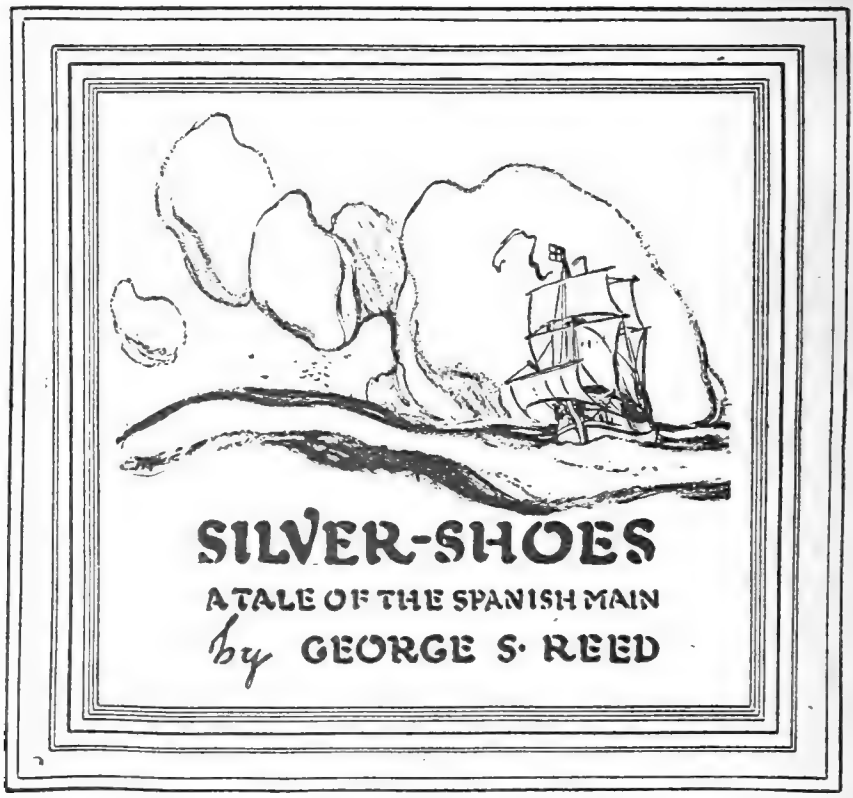

SILVER-SHOES

A TALE OF THE SPANISH MAIN

by GEORGE S. REED

CHAPTER XXVII

WILDERNESS WAYFARING

SLOWLY and carefully we slipped down the treacherous boulders, the thick gloom concealing us from observation of giant hills, beyond which lay Panama and the vengeance of the pirates we were escaping.

Then in single file, the Don leading, then Romeo, the maid—my brother's betrothed—then myself, each holding to the one before, we entered a grove of trees and night had closed upon us like the clamp of a chest-cover, making a blackness that was nigh impenetrable.

How the Spaniard knew where to proceed filled me with wonder. When, several hours later, the moon arose and its beams here and there filtered through the thick foliage, he stopped and pointed toward a path leading down a steep declivity.

"Yonder lies an Indian village which will give me a sack of maize for my dagger. They are enemies to all English and I would best go alone. What think you?"

"Good enough," I answered, feeling of my empty pockets, whereat he disappeared.

"Aye, it may be more than good," growled Romeo, following a short distance and seating himself upon a stone, his sword in hand and his face turned from us. The maid sought rest on a tree-trunk, but I, like Romeo, drew my blade, both of us aware of this new danger from Indians and realizing how dependent upon Don Pedro we had perforce become. The faint rattle of steel drew milady's notice.

"It sparkles like a jewel, yet I despise it," she meditated. What wouldst do, Firebrand, had you no weapons?"

"Like Samson shorn of his locks, I should die," I answered.

"Will you never give up the sword?"

"Nay, it is my best friend, always ready and willing. Nor ever speaks untruths!"

"'Tis your best friend in that it is your tool, your minion, and can do naught save what you desire, and speaks in tireless ignorance only to say 'die, die.'"

"From infancy I have known of nothing

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else," I said in some surprise, "save drill in sword-play. When a mere lad I bested my father at fence and was therefore sent to Ireland to become a swordsman. My teacher was rigid in discipline and set in his opinions. He had scant respect for the fool's wisdom of our frivolous Court and its curse of light wantonness. He taught me to be a soldier, to fight for England and the King, and to be a friend only to those of honor and loyalty."

"Doth your King have these traits?"

"I fight not for him as a Stuart, but as King of England."

"And what will you do when the goal is reached? Will the sword rest until a new quest be found, or will it slay for the sake of slaughter?" There was a note of mockery in her voice.

"I shall give myself to be hanged, milady," I replied.

She made no answer. There fell a silence as deep as the semigloom of the forest where we sat.

Later Romeo came to me and whispered: "Some one is coming! Be ready!"

We separated, one on each side of the path, and listened till the Spaniard came toiling up the slope, a lone figure, bearing a small sack upon his shoulders. We advanced to meet him warily, and Romeo relieved him of his burden, but held it in such fashion he could drop it on the instant.

Don Pedro had little news save that the barter had been made and 'twere wise to be on our way lest they fancy to follow. Romeo started to carry the sack, but milady interposed.

"Give it to him," she said, pointing at me, and with a chuckle the lad laid it at my feet. I shouldered it indifferently, and we marched away in Indian file, as before.

For an hour and more we toiled painfully up a steep hill, then the descent began and, as we proceeded into the valley, the ground grew boggy. As was customary, I paused to remove my shoes, whereat the maid, who must have had eyes in the back of her head, turned to laugh at me. The Spaniard silenced her instantly, warning us all not to make the least sound, as we were in a dangerous country, the valley being infested with hostile Indians.

His warning came in good time, for we now perceived through the thicket, at some distance, a large fire. As we made a detour, there broke forth mad screams.

At first methought we were discovered. Happily this was false, and the savages had but recommenced their fantastic dancing, which would continue until dawn. The why and wherefore of such proceeding Don Pedro could not tell, but thought they had approached Panama as near as they dared and were hurling defiance at our erstwhile comrades.

Just as the sky changed to the first dull gray of daylight we halted, built a small fire carefully screened and made a tasteless meal of maize.

Then scrambling into the thicket and covering ourselves with leaves we fell dead asleep.

Toward late afternoon, when the heat grew less severe and the cool breeze arose, we started on, entering a much denser wilderness of tropical growth. At midnight, milady, who had been walking uncertainly for a time, dropped to the ground exhausted, saying she was faint from lack of proper food and her feet were covered with sores.

Romeo and I carried her to a near-by brook where she could bathe, then we sought in the forest for provender. On the march from Chagres to Panama the army had made so great a noise, firing their matchlocks and shouting to keep courage from waning, that the wild beasts had run away in terror. Now the solitude was impressive and we were so much a part of it that all animals, even monkeys, would come curiously to us, did we stand at rest, wondering, no doubt, what species of forest growth we were. In consequence 'twas not long ere we killed a monkey, and soon a piece was roasting over our small fire. Although milady disliked the taste, yet she managed to eat her share, and toward morning we resumed our march.

When day dawned we were still tramping, now more slowly because of the maid, who, to her credit be it said, was most plucky and must have suffered keenly, until the heat forced us to camp by the side of a sizable stream.

I scooped out a coconut and brought it to her filled with water, also offering my coat for a pillow. Both of these she took, and thanked me in so sweet a voice I hastily beat a retreat. Some time later I turned and found her eyes upon me, which was disconcerting. So I changed my position to a spot behind a decayed tree-trunk, shortly discovering I had lain upon a colony

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of ants, who nibbled at me so direfully I gave a cry which woke us all. Romeo laughed, but milady did not. Finally my position was again changed and peace restored.

When ready to start, later in the day, we were forced to follow the river for some distance. Then we found a narrow bend across which hung a fallen tree. Once over this and well within the forest again, Don Pedro announced he had lost the way. Much dismayed, we held consultation. Judging we had gone about six leagues and therefore were half-way, the Spaniard finally decided to set his compass due east, thereby hoping 'twould bring us upon the coast near Chagres.

WE MADE small progress the remainder of the night, finding the ground so swampy and thick with rotting tree-trunks and pools of stagnant water as to render procedure well nigh impossible. With the dawn it commenced to rain, soon pelting us in earnest and seemingly increasing each minute. We were unable to light a fire for our meager meal, and the bog and lack of shelter prevented rest.

Milady struggled manfully for a time with her bruised feet and gnawing hunger, then commenced to drag along uncertainly. Romeo and Don Pedro were in advance, cutting our way through the thick growth in vain search for higher ground. I knotted the bag of maize, now much diminished, into my belt and, placing one arm about her and the other 'neath her shoulder, strove to be of assistance.

For another hour we wandered through the forest when the rain, which had been strong before now, turned to a cascade. The thunder roared and lightning flashed incessantly, accompanied by an odor of powder and sulphur which choked us. The stagnant pools of water rose like magic, joining one with the other, in a trice making our way a vast inland sea through which we plowed, sinking well to our knees at every step. I whispered words of encouragement to milady who, with dropping head and leaning, almost a dead weight, upon me, despondently pulled her small feet from the sucking mud again and again and again.

Between the terrible din of thunder and the cries of the forest horde I could hear her sobbing. When she commenced to shiver I feared that dread attack of swamp-fever which ofttimes is fatal. Considerably disturbed, I removed my coat and wrapped it about her, which was of little help as the coat itself was soaking wet.

To my left I discovered a hollow silk-cotton-tree. I drew the maid to it. Romeo and the Spaniard ceased all effort toward further progress and crawled within another near-by. The crash of thunder and roaring of wind made talk impossible. To my dismay I found no other tree about, so, with the air of a thief, I entered that of the maid.

'Twas large and roomy, the water sweeping about in a small eddy, which did not, fortunately, sweep away a heap of débris in the center on which the maid was seated. Through a rent in the bark a flash of lightning showered upon me as I entered, and she stretched out her thin arms, as if for protection.

So I sat beside her, drawing up my feet to escape the water. Taking her hand, I patted it as I had seen Dutch mothers do to their children. Of the tempest and our predicament I was indifferent, but when the maid slipped her arm about my elbow and laid her head upon my breast, I became an arrant coward and fell to shivering, from what I know not. I dared make no move, for fear of disturbing her. As her trembling decreased and finally she lay passive, I knew she had fallen asleep from exhaustion. So I remained silently rigid, taking my dagger in my free hand and pricking my knee with it when my eyes closed, and truly the Goddess of Sleep was feminine in her persistence.

For a while the water about us increased in depth and I feared 'twould soon reach us. Fortunately the storm abated in time and the flow rapidly subsided. Then as suddenly a ray of sunlight filtered through the opening, and over the low roll of distant thunder I heard my name called. After several repetitions a figure darkened the entrance and with a low whistle stood silently watching us.

"Chucking a maid!" Romeo exclaimed giggling.

"Shut up, you fool!" I whispered.

He poked his head within, looking curiously at my knee.

"What hath been doing to y'self, Apollo?"

"Shut up, fool that you are!" I repeated and Romeo saw I was in earnest, for he

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stepped backward and out of sight, muttering of a nest of snakes. And then to my great relief the maid opened her eyes and drew away.

"The storm is over?"

"Aye, and that fool comrade of mine hath disturbed you," I replied, shifting an aching position with great satisfaction which I could not conceal.

"I have slept enough—at your expense," she continued, her dark eyes making me uncomfortable. Thereat she arose and passed out into the sunlight. I followed some moments later, as soon as I could control my cramped limbs.

The ground was soggy and soft and the foliage dripping, but the water had receded into large pools. Romeo and the Don were busied in spreading some wood in shafts of sunlight penetrating through the interstices, while over all spread the soothing heat, making short work of drying both the wood and our bedraggled clothing. Soon a fire was lighted and a meal prepared, partly of the maize from my sack, and of some meat remaining from a strange beast the Spaniard had snared with bush-ropes the day previous.

Later we sat down to the welcome repast in high spirits, Romeo ever and anon pulling forth his book to read some cant in regard to great sacrifice made by brave knights for their ladies fair. I knew he was subtly teasing me for the stains upon my knee. Don Pedro also made a faint attempt at raillery, more to cheer milady than aught else, for she sat munching in silence, her eyes wandering from me to forest vacancy, and her thoughts serious and far away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SILVER-MAID LEADS US

ALL that night we tramped through the morass, reaching firmer ground toward dawn. Ere the sun arose we came upon a solitary hut.

An aged Indian woman of great girth and smiling face welcomed us cordially, and during the day granted us shelter. She took charge of the maid, giving her a potion which removed all danger of fever, for late in the afternoon she came forth with red blooms in her cheeks and her eyes bright and sparkling.

We resumed our march an hour before sundown, milady offering to relieve me for a while of the small quantity of maize. And now we entered a zone containing the singing insects, so familiar to Romeo and myself, which caused vast discomfort.

The way led through an unusually thick growth, somewhat swampy but easy of travel compared with that of the day previous. Toward morning we came to a large river, the Chagres, so said the Spaniard, though it had no familiar look to me, probably because the recent rain had swollen it. Then it moved sluggishly and was shallow. Now 'twas racing and of goodly depth.

After a rest of several hours, leaving milady slumbering we set to work dragging large logs to the river, where by aid of strong creepers we made a sizable float.

According to the Spaniard, although he was not sure of the distance, he thought we were about three leagues from Chagres Castle. If he was correct we had been right in our calculations, striking the river at a most favorable spot. By poling we could gain the opposite bank ere carried very far down-stream, then with several days' travel, veering our course diagonally toward the coast, we would, in all likelihood, fall in with a forage-party of Spaniards. If not, 'twould then be but a matter of hours before reaching the settlement itself.

Then the raft was completed, the poles prepared, milady awakened and placed aboard. We shoved off into the current, which shot us down-stream at a prodigious rate. By hard poling and much labor we slipped clear of the rapids ere passing the bend, and once in still water soon reached land again. We tramped away into the forest, and after daybreak, when the heat became intense, sought rest amidst the trees.

A second day passed in this wise, then, realizing our freedom from pursuit, we became careless of movement, building fires openly and keeping watch only for hostile Indians. As for milady, she had our greatest respect because of her cheerfulness, willingness and endurance.

I fell to watching her in much the fashion as a miser guards his gold, solicitous only for her welfare, thus to bring her safely to my brother, and in many ways was able to render her hard travel less arduous. She, in turn, was most gracious with me, showing her appreciation in such winsomeness

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'twas a joy to seek for further service—and she would still be calling me "Firebrand," in a fashion mightily pleasing!

On the third day, soon after we had lain down to rest, I grew uneasy in the stillness, perhaps because of the singing insects. Be that as it may, however, I rolled upon my side and lay staring into the thicket, wondering how near the Spanish settlements we had come.

Of a sudden I saw a brown thing move in the brush. Curious to know what manner of beast prowled so near our still smoking fire, I watched it carefully. To my surprise another was following in its rear, then another, and suddenly a brown hand pushed aside the lush grass and a painted face with a huge ring through its nose stared out at me.

Instantly I sprang to my feet shouting and, sword in hand, ran to the maid, whom I shook roughly and bade crawl into a near-by tree-trunk. Then I whipped about to face the charge of a dozen painted, gruesome savages. Romeo and the Spaniard were by me, ready with their blades.

As they rushed they threw long spears, several finding a mark. One entered my leg and bore me to my knees ere I could wrench it away. Then I caught the nearest foe on my point, ran him through and turned to spit a man kneeling over Romeo, trying vainly to rise. Don Pedro was hard-pressed and we hastened to help him.

What would ordinarily have been a mimic attack was for a few minutes made serious by the fact that we had no armor. Then the charge was over and the three or four remaining alive darted away into the forest.

Romeo had a bruised temple and the Spaniard two flesh wounds, but he seemed greatly concerned at the attack and bade us fly to the woods, for the Indians were sure to return in large numbers and we should be lost. So, dragging the maid from her concealment, we gathered our few belongings and ran away into the forest, intent only upon placing as great a distance as possible betwixt us and a mock battle-ground—a battle wherein the victors ran away.

The heat was intense and perspiration dropped from us in streams. After two hours and more of alternate running and walking, we halted by a brook to cool our heated faces, then sought rest, well hidden in the undergrowth. Romeo, the Spaniard and myself watched by turn.

When the sun sank behind the trees and we were ready to start, Don Pedro came to me with troubled face.

"I have lost the compass," he said, looking about him.

We commenced a vigorous but fruitless search and judged he had shaken it from his pocket, the flap of which was uncaught. We examined his coat carefully and found a spear-thrust had ripped the lining in such a fashion as to render his pocket useless.

Loss of the compass was the most fatal blow to our hopes yet encountered. It left grave doubt as to procedure and made travel by night impossible, so we returned to our rough couches, crestfallen. The maid, however, seemed indifferent to our plight. In turn she bade each of us good night and then called cheerily to me that it looked as though we were doomed to wander on forever, whereat I marveled at such buoyancy and culled new courage from it ere I went to sleep.

NOW came a day when we traveled a few hours, uncertain of direction and seeking our guide in the course of the sun, but the heat became intense and we sought shelter. A second day passed in this wise, then a third, and finally we lost count of days and direction, seeking only for food, which became harder and more difficult to find. At last we were forced to rely for sustenance upon berries and fruits, the latter also growing scarce.

Romeo's light-heartedness forsook him; his book and his sayings from Shakespeare were forgotten, and he relapsed into sullen stolid silence, at times scarce speaking the whole day. The Spaniard's courage also waned and he constantly bemoaned the fact we were doomed to a lingering death in the wilderness. He should never see his boy again, and life was no longer worth living. This was mightily disconcerting to the maid and I silenced him speedily, but we knew by his look of despair and his mumbling that all hope had in truth gone from his heart.

Upon me fell the care of milady and together we strove to continue each other's courage. To this day 'tis doubtful who was the greater help. I told her stories of England, Scotland, Holland, wherever I had been. All the details of my life were spread

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before her and finally I fell back upon fairy stories, and found I had an imagination which belied my vocation. On her side, she would tell me of great deeds done by brave men, while I would lie on my back seemingly seeing the leaves above smoking in the glare of noonday, or counting the stars in the cool of evening.

Our clothes became tattered and my fine shoes with their silver buckles were worn to shreds. From the skins of monkeys with the aid of small fibers she made herself a wondrous garment which, although somewhat uncomfortable because of its heat, fitted her trim figure to a nicety.

Not once did she complain, but at night or during the day when we were tired and had lain down to rest she would fix a spot just far enough away so that by stretching her brown hand she could touch me, the which she would do many times. And only when she thought we were all asleep would her courage give way, and then I could hear her choke softly and stifle the sobs which must come in spite of all.

On one of these occasions I had the temerity to stretch my hand toward her, and to my joy she caught it and a few minutes later fell asleep. This practise grew until each time we rested sleep came not till our hands were clasped.

Poor little maid! Bereft of all comforts, shorn of silks and satins, music and sweetmeats, society and that homage a virgin soul of beauty deserves; lost in the wilderness of a strange land with a trio of rough, uncouth men, who, although willing to do what they might, could scarce understand the delicate, sweet nature of ideal womanhood which longed for the solace of her kind!

AND now, strange to say, we grew hardened to all vagaries of weather; rain or sunshine it mattered not, nor did the heat affect us as of yore, and even the singing insects passed us by, for our skins became too tough for them to pierce.

But the ill-sorted diet affected the Spaniard, and one day he went out of his head, commencing an imaginative feast that terrified us. At first we watched him closely, taking away his weapons lest he do harm with them. But he became as gentle and helpless as a babe and only when hungry did his madness take hold, whereupon he would exhaust himself by enumerating the dishes at a king's banquet. This he did so well our dry tongues would curl into a knot.

Then the wound in my leg commenced to pain and soon it was in such a state I could scarce walk. The other leg fell sick from sympathy and I became an invalid. Upon Romeo and the maid devolved the responsibility of supplying us with food. So angry was I at my weakness that one day when alone with the Spaniard, who sat as usual nodding and blinking at vacancy, I crawled into the forest in search of food. There I was found senseless by Romeo, who, weak as he was, dragged me back to camp. Later the maid gave me so sweet a scolding I vowed, were I left alone, to do it over.

But food grew scarcer and the time came when both Romeo and the maid were too weak to search for more. Then they crawled to my side and we lay motionless, with our gnawing pains, awaiting the end. The Spaniard sat upon a log, also deep in suffering, for great beads of perspiration rolled down his face while he weakly went through the chatter and motions of some historic banquet in the ages past. Suddenly his voice failed, and he swayed pitifully to and fro, finally toppling to the ground, where he lay quiet and at rest. I thought he was dead.

And while I was looking up at the stars for the last time a little hand crept over my chest, its fingers nestling 'gainst my cheek, as if they had tried in vain to encircle it, and a weak voice whispered, "Farewell—my Firebrand!" whereupon I forgot the tearing pains and drifted into darkness.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN A SECOND, BY YOUR LEAVE, WE FLY TO MERRY ENGLAND

AND now must necessarily follow a change in my history, wherein the personal is less prominent—which may prove a saving grace! I repeat the tale as 'twas told me by those who knew what happed.

Fevers and hurts are full of distaste. Therefore will I pass over in as brief a summary as possible the dreary weeks and months of even greater tedium to me than yourself; weeks of fever and months of blankness, when my mind was gone, and I

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knew nothing, not even my own name, although my body had recovered.

Previous to doing this, however, it becomes necessary to take a flight over the three months' travel from Port Royal to London Town in as many seconds, and look upon Sir George Marley at the same moment as when our small band gave up its struggle and lay down to die.

Sir George's large garden was ablaze with lights, music, laughter and merrymaking, for this was the night of a Marley play, wherein Nell Gwynne and Fletcher would perform. His Majesty, and all the Dukes and Duchesses and Lords and Ladies of high and low degree, who had the favor and could come, were there. Upon the water-front a stage had been erected, and some marvelous settings of a vivid Inferno, more costly perhaps than such buffoonery deserved, loomed up toward the stars. Beneath the numerous tinseled lanterns, converging in rows from all points of the garden walls to a center of corresponding height within the palace, swayed the throng, bejeweled, bedecked and bewantoned in their gorgeous finery or the lack of it. A band of musicians were busy at their instruments, with which mingled the murmur of voices in chatter and jest.

Suddenly from the water-front glowed a red light, then another and another until the painted Inferno seemed all too real. A score of players, accompanied by the Master of Ceremonies, who would introduce them, advanced to the center of the stage. As suddenly came a stillness from the throng seated about the garden in expectant excitement, for 'twas said a man was to float in air, and the waters of the Thames would be made to boil.

At this moment, while the Master was droning his introduction, came a timid knock upon the wicket I had once entered, and Cranston—grim, impenetrable, faithful Cranston—swung it open to admit a tall, thin lad whose sober clothes seemed strangely out of place. There came a rustle at the wicket. Several guards closed about the intruder. There was a suppressed whisper of voices, then the group dissolved, and Cranston and the stranger passed beyond the glare into the palace.

Sir George was at cards with the King, Lady Castlemaine and the Duke of York, and Cranston dared not interrupt. Therefore he left the newcomer in care of an officer of the guard and sat patiently in the room beyond the merry group of gamblers, to wait until Milord came forth.

From the garden arose screams of laughter, shouts of applause, then a silence followed by more bedlam, and again silence. The players went through their lines, with Fletcher's acting little short of marvelous. Nell Gwynne was moody, for the King had forsaken her for gaming and she played indifferently, yet she was Nell Gwynne and as such received homage. The man floated in air and the waters boiled. All was very wonderful, very amusing and greatly enjoyed, while patiently in wait for him who came not, his arms folded and his eyes upon a closed door, sat Cranston.

At two of the clock the play was over and by four the garden seemed deserted. Aided by the flickering lamps a small host of underlings were tearing down the stage and setting the lawn in order. Still from the room of state whence issued the noise of cards and joviality and the clink of gold Milord came not, and down below upon a stone settle, flanked on either side by soldiers who dared not sleep and who were silently grumbling at their officer, fast in slumber, for doing that which they could not, sat the strange youth also nodding.

Then the darkness without changed to gray. The river mist arose to do battle with the light, and suddenly the sun shone out, its rays snuffing the glow of the remaining lanterns and giving to the garden a pure light such as no human hand could ever achieve, e'en though the Thames was made to boil and a man floated in air!

THE sun accomplished what Cranston dared not, for a stray beam wandering betwixt the curtains annoyed the King and broke up his game. Coaches were called. My Lady Castlemaine, my Lord the Duke of York and his Royal Majesty, King Charles the Second, were whirled away.

Then Sir George came forth.

He was sleepy and in ill humor, for he had lost upward of a thousand pounds, and that upon hands which he dared not play. So sleepy was he that he would have passed Cranston without notice. Even when the letter was placed in his hands he was so tired he could scarce read. But with a single glance at it he straightened, uttered an exclamation and, dropping to a chair,

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scanned it eagerly. From the corner of Cranston's eye came a look of pride, of commendation, and he too straightened up, to live anew.

'Twas a long letter which Milord read carefully and then in slow deliberation read again. He held it up toward the servitor.

"You know what is within?"

"Aye, Milord."

"How long hath he been here?"

"Since the play began, Milord. I dared not interrupt."

"I know, I know." Again he unfolded the letter, to glance at several sentences. "What wouldst do, Cranston?" he said at last, laying the missive upon a table.

"No need for me to answer that, Milord," was the quick reply.

"Aye, no need. You speak truth, Cranston, and Roddy, hasty, impulsive, honest and honorable Roddy, is my brother. I shall go, of course, and at once."

"Of course, Milord."

"The King spoke with me but yesterday in regard to this Morgan and the promised sum. He needs it badly, albeit not so badly as I do. When sails the *Lion* for Virginia?"

"Next Tuesday, Milord."

"Four days. The time is short. How many men go in her?"

"Three hundred, Milord, to fight Indians."

"Aye, I know. Who hath command?"

"Sir John McCartin, Milord."

He arose and placed the letter carefully in his silken jacket. "Sir John will stay at home, methinks. Where is this Spanish youth?"

"In the guard-room, Milord."

"Bring him hither."

Cranston disappeared, returning a few moments later with a tired, faltering youth, whose pale face sent a thrill of pity through Sir George, for he stopped abruptly in his pacing.

"You are Pedro de Luna?" he said, softening his voice.

"*Sí*, your Worship."

"How came my brother to take the pirate's pledge?"

"He overheard their plans and was discovered. 'Twas the only way to save his life."

"And once pledged he would not be allowed to return here. Once a pirate, always a pirate."

"*Sí*, your Worship."

"But you were in captivity. How came you here?"

"We were friendly with the Maroons. They carried me in a dugout to Jamestown. There I bought passage."

"Why came not General Dudley with you?"

The lad shook his head. "I know not, your Worship."

Sir George frowned and bit his lips. "Poor old Dudley. 'The king is dead, long live the King,' and yet for you there is no King but Cromwell. 'Tis God's sweet pity Dudley could not have died with him." He paused, looking at the letter again. "I am asked to return you to Spain, Pedro de Luna. Cranston, when sails the packet for France?"

"At full of the tide this evening, Milord."

"Take this lad——" He stopped suddenly, for the youth had sunk into the servant's arm and was held by a strength not his own. "Nay—put him in my bed and give him good rest with whatever he will have to eat and drink. If he be able, ship him off on the packet and," here Sir George screwed his face to a weak smile, "fill his pocket with gold. If not, have a doctor and treat him as he were your own son. Begone, Cranston."

"Yes, Milord." The servant picked up the lad as if he were a feather and departed.

Sir George walked to the window, threw aside the curtains and frowned. "So the maid is in Panama. But where is Roddy? Odds fish! There will be three hundred men and myself to drain these Southern Seas for answer ere Jamestown be reached."

His face shone in the sun's rays, for a moment set and grim, as if he would do the whole world battle. Then it relaxed into a faint smile and, closing the draperies, he laid down upon a couch.

Sir George Marley was asleep.

CHAPTER XXX

SILVER-SHOES IN THE DARKNESS

BEFORE the advent of the Spaniard and his exterminating brutality into the new land, there lived two great races of primeval savages: the Caribs and the Arawaks. The Caribs were nomadic and fighters; the Arawaks, peaceful and home-

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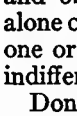
loving. With the entrance of the Spaniard, the Caribs hastened to do battle. This may in a measure excuse their wholesale extermination, but offers no justification for the ruthless slaughter of the gentle Arawaks.

To a band of these peace-loving natives we four owed our lives, for they discovered us and, with knowledge of the herbs and grasses, soon restored milady, Romeo and Don Pedro to life and health again. But although life and health came to me, yet reason was dead. I became an object of pity to my comrades and of veneration to the savages, for they believed the Great Spirit had worked a spell.

Because of such superstition, we were obliged to remain with them many days, until the maid persuaded the chief by the gifts of all our weapons and one of my silver buckles to give us a guide and sufficient provender for the march to Spanish settlements.

The way was long, for our wanderings had swung us in a circle, away from both Chagres and Panama into a strange and wild country northward, and many days elapsed ere the blue of the Southern Seas and a vista of Spanish dwellings came in sight.



HERE we were shown every courtesy and attention, and a Spanish doctor of some renown came to give me treatment. But, as for me, nothing was of interest save a sword and the maid. I would hold a piece of steel in my hands for hours, looking at it with great satisfaction, turning it this way and that and playing with it like a child. Milady I would follow and obey as devotedly as any dog. She alone could manage me, and the others, after one or two trials wherein I looked stolidly indifferent at them, gave up all attempt.

Don Pedro, upon news that a ship would set sail for Hispaniola, begged permission for us to go in her, and received a grant for all save myself, for their medical man, through my ravings, had discovered I was naught else than the pirate Silver-Shoes, of whom they had heard both at Chagres and Panama. I must stay—later to be tortured, did reason return.

At this time the Plate Fleet entered the harbor bearing the Spanish Crown Prince, who, being of an inquisitive mind, had come to look over his future possessions. Don Pedro knew the youth and gained an interview on board his galleon.

Here he received the blessed news that his son was in Spain, having been returned by an English lord named Sir George Marley. With this kindness on my brother's part as a strong argument for like favor to me, he finally induced the Prince to grant what the stubborn Governor would not.

So we passed to Hispaniola, where the Don vainly used all argument with the maid to proceed with him to Spain. She was bent upon returning to Port Royal, and finally he gave up pleading, bade us a most touching and affectionate farewell, breaking into tears as he shook my hand in parting, and procured a boat to carry us to the west coast of Jamaica.

Once on the shores of English domain, and the maid was in a strange country no longer. For a twelvemonth preceding her departure to Panama she had lived among the Maroons, who were gentle and good to her because of the many favors done them by her father, and some of these soon came upon us. To Romeo and myself they said nothing, passing us by with scowls and glances full of hatred, but to the maid they were devoted.

Under their guidance we traveled across Jamaica by easy stages, until from the crest of a high hill we could see Spanish Town. Here Romeo was sent forward to reconnoiter, while I sat at milady's feet and crazily played with a spear-point in the moonlight. Toward morning he returned, with the startling news that Dudley was not to be found and his home had been burned; that Morgan had returned with but a few of the freebooters, because of dissension at Chagres, and was now at the Town; Shattuck and Lollie Hatton had taken command of the several hundred disgruntled men left at Chagres and purposed to prey and plunder Spanish life and property thereabout, using the Castle of San Lorenzo as a base for operations. At Port Royal, however, was a large English line-of-battle ship with many soldiers, and their leader had been in several conferences with Morgan.

All of this was very strange and mystifying, so milady decided we should veer our course toward Port Royal, where Romeo could disguise himself as before and glean further news. The lad was overjoyed at this suggestion, for it smacked of Betty;

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therefore we proceeded slowly toward the sea.

When as near as we dared go, a camp was made, and Romeo sent forth upon his mission. Through a long night the maid watched for his return in vain, and not until daylight did she give up hope, withdrawing with the rest a half-league into the forest.

The dreary day was an anxious one for the brave little leader, for she feared Romeo had met with serious trouble, and bereft of him she knew not what to do. Therefore was she sober and sad and fell to sobbing several times. This was not understood by me and I watched her wonderingly, running close and patting her hand, then darting away and falling to the ground growling, my chin betwixt my hands and staring at her. I glared at the negroes covertly, my clogged brain convinced that in some way they had displeased her. So I selected a large club and bided the time to do them hurt.

At nightfall we advanced to our former position. Toward midnight the lone figure of Romeo, approaching through the trees, caused milady to give a cry of joy and rush to greet him. I followed stealthily, carrying my club, and turning now and then to glance threateningly at the four Maroons.

But Romeo's face was very sober, and he greeted her with the news of Dudley's death at the hands of Morgan's men. He had seen Betty, who secreted him in one of the back chambers of the inn, where, every few minutes during the day, she would run for more unraveling of his marvelous tale.

From her he had learned of the sullen, silent return of Morgan and his handful of men; sullen because they had not the gold they sought; silent in the dread of what might hap as a result of the quarrel which had occurred at Chagres over the division of spoil. These few had escaped late at night, bearing the best of the plunder with them. Ere Dudley could fly to the hills they were upon him, and Cromwell's faithful servant went to his blessed rest, a martyr to the brutality of vicious, degraded humanity.

Of the ship in the harbor Romeo had great news. Their leader was none other than my brother! If the same met with milady's approval, he would suggest we return with him this night to Port Royal, which could be done openly and in safety, as none of the freebooters were nearer than Spanish Town.

AFTER some hesitation the maid assented. She returned to the Maroons, thanking them gently, and granting release from further service. They nodded to her in farewell and started away into the forest, wherefore I, seeing the maid again in tears and fearful of losing my prey, rushed after them with a loud shout, brandishing my club.

Suddenly aroused to action, milady ran wildly after me, screaming to them not to do me hurt, which was grimly unheeded, for one stepped aside and, as I passed by in search of the three beyond, dealt a wicked blow which toppled me to the ground.

"You coward!" cried the maid as she cupped my bruised head in the hollow of her arm, but only the rustle of leaves and the sound of Romeo's quick step as he raced to her gave answer. And then, as she sent him for water from a spring, I opened my eyes and looked into her own, now moist with living jewels and shining in fear of me.

"A vision—a wonderful vision," I said weakly, raising a hand and drawing it down her cheek.

"Firebrand—you know me!" she exclaimed, bending down eagerly.

"Aye, milady. We did not then die in the wilderness?"

"Oh, thank God!" choked the maid, her cheek upon mine own and the tears starting afresh. She essayed to speak further, but her suddenly wrought-up nature forbade, so she lay against me, sobbing her joy, while I relapsed again into darkness, but a blessed darkness, for from it I would awake not only to life but reason.

CHAPTER XXXI

LIKE A FALLEN STAR

AND now, having explained in much the same fashion as it was afterward told to me how we escaped death in the wilderness, and how Sir George Marley came to Port Royal in a line-of-battle ship, it is my privilege to renew the personal memory.

The blow upon my skull while in the thickets before Port Royal had in some miraculous manner removed the clog upon my brain, so that when I awoke to life and (Heaven be praised!) to reason, 'twas to

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find myself on board the *Lion* within a stern cabin, and being fawned and fussed over by a pair of worthies, sub-devils to the ship's surgeon. The woven brackets of unlighted candles were swinging, cordage was creaking and water rippled against the planks, all of which foretold we were at sea.

Perceiving me awake, one of the men dropped his cloth and rushed away, while the other pushed my bed to a stern window, whence I could see the vastness of slow-rolling green dotted by white feathers of spray which rose and fell as if to give me greeting.

And while I was silent in wonder there followed a series of pictures, very vivid, very startling, for the door was flung open and Romeo rushed in, dropping to his knees beside me and blubbering like a child. With him was a pretty wench, in whom I recognized Betty, and who kept discreetly in the background till I motioned her to a stool near-by.

The lad related with much eagerness all that had happed and finally concluded by tossing some coins in my lap, saying: "There lies twelve pund, Silver-Shoes, an' ye own me no longer by the weight of gold, but by the love I bear ye. Come, Betty. I have prepared him for Milord. Let's away."

I was too dazed to think, too dumb to make reply, and when the door again opened admitting Sir George (whereat my two attendants stood stiff and erect), I could but stare, as he shook my hand and smiled down at me.

He told how Romeo had boarded his ship at the hour of midnight; how, upon payment of twelve pounds to him, the glad tidings had been given, and how I had been carried through the town by a score of troopers, Sir George at their head. Ere the sun had risen, the anchor was catted and our ship under way bound for Virginia.

Then he gave a mock lecture upon my hasty temper, pointing out the sufferings it had caused me, and suggesting that I change my views of women and marry; that I pick a wise mate who should govern me and who would take care I fell not into error again.

When he paused I started to answer, in a torrent of gratitude, but he slipped his hand over my mouth, and said he had received strict orders from milady not to permit me speech. He bade me rest a few hours longer, as the heat was still severe. At the end of that time, an I so wished, I could come on deck. So saying he departed, whereupon the two attendants doused me with wet cloths and so pestered me that, if such be possible, I fell a-slumbering from very anger.

ALL this took place shortly after midday, and it was late afternoon before I arose, dressed myself in some sober clothes and went on deck.

The sun was well down in the sky, even then on the point of dipping into the sea, and the breeze had died away so that the sails flapped uncertainly and the ship scarce moved. A greater part of the men were below in their hammocks, but a large group were clustered about the long gun in the bow, perched upon which was Romeo singing his songs of the sea. At the stern 'neath an awning were a number of officers at cards with my brother, who, upon seeing me, ended the game abruptly and started to my side, while they passed within the cabins.

Over by the rail, not far from the helmsman and partly concealed by one of the many cannon, was a figure I had thought of often during the long day; the figure of a good, true, brave little maid whose courage had been an inspiration toward greater effort in our fight against starvation, and whose generalship had brought us to Port Royal. She was dressed in silks as modest as they were becoming, but her sweet face was turned away and if she saw me she gave no sign.

And in that moment, with my brother coming toward me and my eyes upon the little maid, I thought of Moss Kingsbury, of Straight Eye, of Lollie Hatton and of Shattuck—grim, unrelenting, savage Dick Shattuck, who had promised me a duel which now would never be fought, and who was once again upon the high seas. His was not the search for gold, excitement, or love of conquest and its consequent power. His was the pursuit of vengeance, terrible, vindictive—an insatiable thirst for Spanish blood, grown beyond control through his own wrongs and never to be satisfied till life was done. And now I felt a tinge of regret, of sorrow, and for the first time of sympathy for the man. Then Sir George's voice sounded in my ear.

"Well, Roddy, art ready for converse?"

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"Aye, Milord," I answered.

"Then speak not of gratitude, for I came hence on the King's service to see this Morgan of yours."

"To see Morgan?" I repeated.

"Aye. We have followed him with care." He sat down upon a stool where he could gaze into the sea. "There was a monstrous plot formed 'gainst Jamaica by the Spaniards. Had not Morgan nipped it by taking Panama, Port Royal would e'en now be in Spanish hands. Captain Morgan hath done well."

"*Captain* Morgan! He is a pirate."

"Nay, he is a true soldier of our land and will soon set sail for London. The King will return him to Jamaica as Vice-Governor. This he knows, as doth the gouty Moddiford."

"Morgan—*Vice-Governor!*"

"Aye, and if he can do as well 'gainst his band of rovers, who I understand are off Chagres upon the sea again, as he hath done *with* them, we need have no fear. And the man hath personality. He is summat of a wit."

"Did he say aught of me?"

Sir George laughed softly. "Odds fish! He talked at length upon you, of your skill in sword-play, your bravery and your cleverness in outwitting him. He took it not so much to heart as did one other whose name I have forgot."

"Shattuck," I said promptly.

"Methinks 'twas the same. This rascal followed you with a troop of horse as far as the Chagres River, but there they lost all trace. Morgan seemed much amused in the telling of it. But Roddy, you did well to gain the maid. She is more beautiful than any woman at our Court."

I turned to him swiftly. "Surely, Milord, you will not place her *there*. She is much too rare and fine a flower to grow amidst such weeds. Surely there must be——" I broke off abruptly, my face grown crimson, for his eyes were upon me curiously. "I crave pardon an I offend," I added, lowering my voice.

"You could never offend me, lad, never, nor could I you. Therefore I will speak plainly. Do you love the little maid?"

I took a deep breath and looked him squarely in the eyes till my own wavered and dropped down upon the deck.

"I'm afraid I do, Milord," I answered slowly.

"I have spoken with her and I feared as much," he continued. "You have a way with you of blunt speech when slumbering an your head be on another's arm." He smiled at my look of amazement. "And the little minx hath made good use of her knowledge." Then came a pause, while we both looked seaward. "You remember the tale I told you of Cromwell, Dudley and the maid?" he said suddenly. "Poor old Dudley! Now he lies 'neath a palm, at rest, and near by sits a black-eyed bird who curses whenever any one approaches. At the time I became engaged to the maid I did so merely to repair what otherwise would certes have been an injury to her feelings, for I cared not for her—at least not enough to wive. I made love to her, true, but only to gain knowledge of the foul plot which landed Salmon, Creed and others in London Tower. After that I was sorry for the part I had played and would have wedded, but Dudley *understood*. He did not have to leave England, despite what I first told you, yet he went. Maid Margot knew nothing of my part in the affair, nor doth she now. On her departure she gave me the ring now upon your finger. I promised that no one save her *husband* should ever wear it. Nay, lad, let be. Do not take it off."

"But I shall never wed her. I can not!"

"Why?"

"I fought a wretched duel and dishonorably ran away. I could leave ship at Jamestown and start anew under an assumed name, but that I will not do. I shall return with you, Milord, to London—to the noose at Tynsboro."

"And give up the maid, and life itself?"

"Aye, my mind is set on't."

His face lighted up with a rare smile.

"You have said naught, yet I know why you would do this, and I am proud of you, lad. But there is no need."

"No need!" I hesitated. "Then Fenton is——" My lips framed the word, yet I could not say it.

"Aye, Fenton is dead—dead from a pike-thrust upon the Scottish border. Your blade did not kill." He waited in vain for me to speak and then added: "This is the minute of fear; one knows not whether 'tis day or night. See, the moon yonder hath no light, the sun is gone, yet it is not dark. Ah, well, 'twill soon be London again. I have told the maid of my love for Madam

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Barry, who waits for me there. That leaves her *free*, lad, yonder near the port gun."

"You are to wed Madame Barry?"

He nodded gravely.

I arose unsteadily, threw my shoulders back and took a deep breath. Sir George stood beside me and caught my arm.

"One word more and I am done," he hesitated. "The part I played to discover the Roundhead plot. You think not less of me, Roddy. I value your opinion and I would have the truth."

"God's love!" I exclaimed, gripping his soft hand so tightly he winced. "You should know *me*, Milord."

"Aye, lad, good lad. Go to her," he said, turning away and leaning upon the rail—whereupon Romeo and Betty emerged from their dishonorable concealment, and slipped to another near milady, like a pair of children at play, or so confessed the lad afterward!

BUT in the darkness which had come I was gone from Milord, unaware of Romeo or Betty, toward the small figure I knew so well despite her silk gown. She arose as I drew nigh and started toward me, the faint glint of moonbeam lighting her face and revealing that sweet grant of heart and soul which would endure forever.

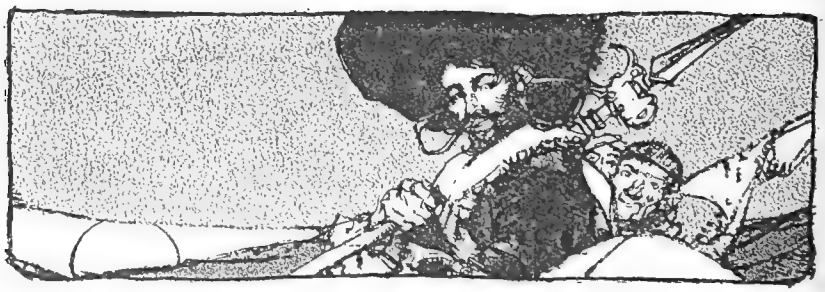
Neither of us spoke, but I held out my arms and she came closely and securely within them.

Then from beyond in the forecastle several voices broke into song, the flap of canvas and the swinging of blocks made accompaniment, and the water gurgled alongside in nautical applause, while I whispered, drawing her closer, "Little maid." And she replied, in an echo of that fateful night among the hills of Panama when we lay down to die, "My Firebrand!"

"Did I not tell ye so," whispered Romeo excitedly, peeping over the gun almost upon us. "An' doth not Shakespeare say, 'all's well that ends well?' See, heart o' my heart—an ye love me, come now, chuck me likewise."

But we heard nothing in that wondrous hour, for, like a fallen star, the whole world had ceased to be.

THE END



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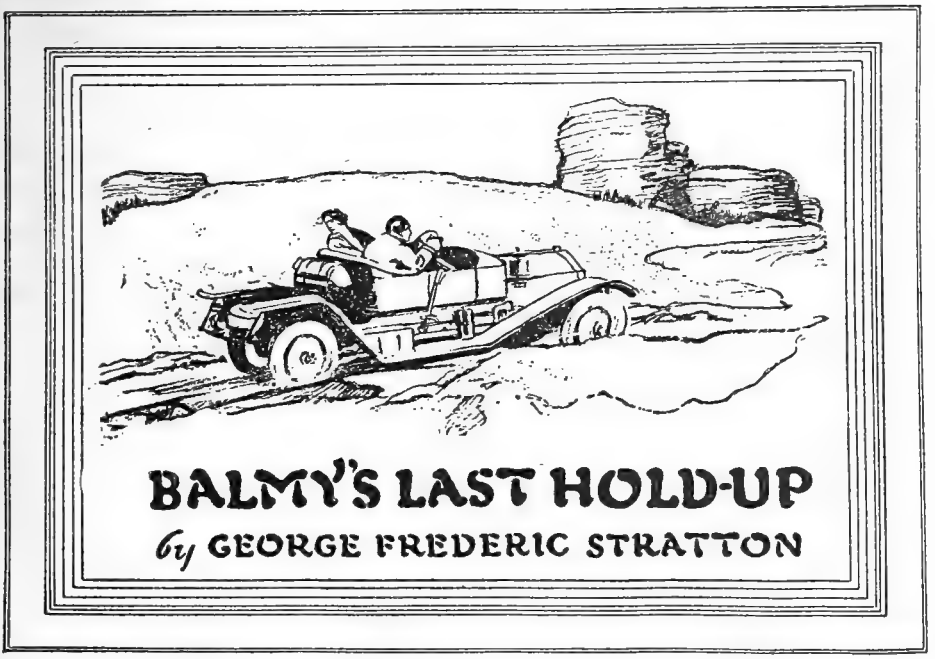

BALMY'S LAST HOLD-UP

by GEORGE FREDERIC STRATTON

WHEN Balmy rode out from the shadow of Bald Cliff and held up the Mineral Flat stage, an amused twinkle came into his eyes as he estimated the few passengers, and he murmured, "Nothing doing, I guess." But neither twinkle nor murmur were reflected in the steady warning oscillation of the revolver he held in each hand.

"I'll ask you to step down, gentlemen," he remarked in courteous tones. "Keep your hands away from your hips, or you'll get the usual one-way ticket in a mighty unusual hurry!"

Three men climbed from the stage—a canyon-wagon with three cross-seats—and stood at the side of the trail, hands up.

"Stay where you are, driver!" commanded Balmy, "and keep your hands on the canopy." Turning to the fourth passenger, a girl whose luminous questioning eyes showed more of curiosity than alarm, he touched the rim of his hat with his revolver-barrel and murmured, "Keep your seat, young lady."

He dismounted, sauntered behind the three men, extracted three guns from their pockets and demanded their wallets. From one man, the best dressed of the three and the most abjectly frightened, he secured a roll of bills. From the other two he got nothing, as he had expected.

"Broke!" grunted one of the men. "We're prospectors, as you can see, an' we haven't even got a grub-stake. We're clean broke!"

Balmy leaned back against the hind wheel of the stage, his elbows resting on it, and scrutinized the prospectors good-humoredly.

"So you didn't strike pay-dirt on the Toltec Gorge?" he grinned.

A glare of surprise came into the man's eyes. "Wha'd you know 'bout the Toltec Gorge? Never ran across *you* up there."

"Yes you did!" retorted Balmy. "Two years ago I struck your shack and spent a night there, and got some good grub, which the same I needed bad."

"By gee!" exclaimed the prospector who had not spoken, "it's Balmy Rockcliffe!"

"That's correct," laughed Balmy. "Where are you fellows going now?"

"Chicoto Mountains," replied the man, "if we can make it, but I don't see how we can. We've heard of a prospect up there—got a pointer from a Ute Indian. But we're in hard luck, an' three hundred miles away from any friends. An' grub-staking ain't so easy to get as it was."

There was so strong a glint of good-natured sympathy in Balmy's eyes that the first prospector said jocularly:

"Sh'd think you might do some grub-

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staking, Rockcliffe. Stage-robbin' ain't so good as it was, I hear; an' if we struck rich you could nachully lay off."

"This is my chance to do the Good Samaritan act, eh?" laughed Balmy. Then his glance fell on the girl. She was leaning out of the forward seat, the color in her face coming and going. In her clear level eyes, which were fastened on the prospectors, was the same sympathy which was in Balmy's. She followed with a glance at him, and a deep flush came into her face; not of fear, or even of strong disapproval, but of recognition, although whether welcome or unwelcome was not revealed.

Again he touched his hat with his revolver and a gleam of admiration came into his frank blue eyes. He turned to the men, peeled some bills from the roll he had taken from the other passenger and handed them to the prospector.

"I'll sit in the game," he laughed. "Five hundred'll get you a couple of burros an' the usual etceteras. You'll notice that this gent here is the original Samaritan, an' he can afford to be. I know him! He jumped a claim on the Thunder River and cleaned up half a million."

The prospectors turned sharply on the third man with stern, fierce scowls, and he shook like a manikin of milk-white jelly.

"It's a mistake, gentlemen!" he stammered lamely. "The—the claim was mine—honestly."

"Honestly!" sneered Balmy, and the bitter contempt and disgust in his tones made further comment unnecessary. Even the stage-robber had nothing but abhorrence for claim-jumping. "We'll let it go at that," he continued.

THEN he stepped to the front wheel, over which the girl sat, and said:

"I saw that you recognized me, Miss Woodruff."

She shrank back a little, but her passionately expressive eyes showed no fear, and the full young lips were set confidently together.

"Of course I did," she murmured, perhaps with a note of defiance in her tones.

"It's queer to see you out in this country," smiled Balmy. "I thought you were up in Raw Hide, teaching the young idea how to shoot?"

"I could do that!" she retorted, and her hand, grasping a serviceable revolver, stole from beneath the robe. Balmy glanced at it and at her with undisguised admiration.

"You sure could!" he exclaimed. "That's the gun you got on the Raw Hide stage. Why didn't you use it to-day?"

"You haven't interfered with me, and these men should take care of themselves. So should you. You take no care of yourself or your future. I thought you were going to reform?"

"Did you think that? Really? Say! Did you hope it?"

The question was so intense in its solicitude that the girl showed her first touch of confusion. A flush of red came into her brown cheeks and the eyelids drooped for an instant, but an instant only.

She replied in a low, passionate voice:

"No, I did not think it. I did not think—I do not now think, that it is possible."

Balmy winced at the reproach in her voice, at the sweet, full earnestness in her eyes. Then he inquired:

"You are going to Santa Fé, I surmise?"

"Las Vegas," she corrected.

"School-teaching again?"

Again she nodded.

"You'll sure find better prospects there, an' bigger money than in little ole Raw Hide. Well, I'll not detain you all any longer."

But as he turned slowly away his hand slipped over the girl's, and his fingers closed with light but unmistakable pressure. And although the grasp was but for a moment, Balmy's blood surged within him as he felt that her hand was not instantly snatched away. It remained where he left it.

He nodded in careless friendliness to the prospectors as he mounted his mare, but one of them stepped to his side and said:

"Look here! You've grub-staked us, but you haven't given us any address where we can let you know if anythin' pans out."

Balmy grinned delightedly.

"Where you can send a sheriff to visit me, I suppose you mean!"

The prospector spat on the ground and ejaculated: "——!" turning instantly and apologetically to the girl. "I couldn't help it; sure Miss! That's what it is to think that men who are grub-staked this way won't be square. It's plumb peevish!"

"Don't irrigate the landscape with your tears," grinned Balmy. "I'll stop them."

He pulled a slip of paper and a pencil

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stub from his pocket and wrote a name and address. Then handing it to the prospector, with a sarcastic grin at the third passenger, he laughed:

"If you pan out a million or more, you can send my share there, or notify me to come and get it. Good luck!"

His hat came off with a sweep, and with one long searching look at the girl, whose eyelids again drooped prettily, he shook his reins and the mare plunged down the trail.

II

FROM girl to grub-stake does not carry the impression of a romantic sequence; and it is true that Balmy's first thoughts as he rode away were all on the girl. But by a very natural train of thought in which his own future and hers were involved, he came to the grub-stake, for Balmy was logical and also very hard-hit.

Girls had come into his life, but not one had occupied his thoughts for one hour after he had left her except this splendid Raw Hide school-teacher. Although when he handed those bills to the prospectors no gleam of any future result had come to him, he thought of that now. If they struck metal, good metal, he could substitute investment for sequestration, and reform.

He grinned amiably as this evolution occurred to him, and he thought of Smith, the Ventura philanthropist, who had piled up his first big capital by going bankrupt three times; of Strohbenson, who wrecked a railroad, froze out the small stockholders and was now in Congress. And that brought him to Balmy Rockcliffe, over the border in Mexico, reformed and raising stock; with the glorious, capable, confident school-teacher to smile at him and scold him and warn him and hold him right down to square dealing.

But prospecting is highly speculative and visionary. He knew that Bergen, the Boisé storekeeper, had staked one prospector for twenty years without returns; that Hendries, a blacksmith by trade, had spent two-thirds of every year of his life prospecting in the Wasatch Mountains and the other third working at his trade to earn another grub-stake.

So he dismissed hope of any result that way, and decided to work down across the border and take a job at ranch work. He made a trip through the Gower's Chance canyon to the ranch of Dyke Harkin, who had always been loyal to him and had profited by the loyalty.

Here he was surprised to find a letter addressed as he had directed the prospectors to address it.

Mr. Stephen Ayland,
% Dyke Harkin,
Red Bluff P. O., N. M.

DEAR SIR:

We've struck it sudden and rich. Silver ore in a seven-foot vein. There's a half a million of it. Anyway the Tehama Co. offers us that, but we won't do anything till we hear from you in reasonable time. A third of it's yours so you'd better get among us plumb quick if you can.

Your friends,
TAGGERT AND HIDRETH.

Although Balmy had never been in the Chicoto Country, and was probably unknown there, he well knew the danger of a published and portrayed outlaw—one for whom a large reward was offered—mixing in with business men anywhere. But there was no fear in Balmy; only appreciation of what he had to face and avoid. Over $150,000 was his if he went in and claimed it, and of course his real name was suppressed; was superseded by "Stephen Ayland."

Even grim old Dyke Harkin was impressed at the parting of Balmy with his beloved mare, for they had to part. He had to leave her with Dyke, for she was as well-known as he was and would surely betray him, no matter how he might be disguised. It took him half an hour to say good-by to her; to tell her what he thought of her unfailing stamina and speed, which had carried him into and out of danger a hundred times. He told her that if he reached Mexico he would send for her; that they should live and die together.

SO HE went into the Chicoto Country, clad as a rough farmer, with a ten days' growth of stubby beard; very unlike the clean-cut, clean-shaven, smartly dressed highwayman. Taggert and Hidreth met him with exuberant welcome, although he saw gloom and uneasiness with it.

"Well! What's the particular brand of trouble?" he grinned after their first greetings. "You look as if the lead had faulted!"

"The lead's all right," muttered Hidreth.

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"There's suthin' else loomin' up. Did you know who that gent was that you held up on that stage?"

"Sure I did!" responded Balmy. "His name's Gower. Made his pile out of the Lone Hand mine on the Thunder River—the claim he jumped."

"Dunno anythin' about that," growled Hidreth. "But his name's Gower, all right, an' he's the president of this here company that's going to buy us out!"

Balmy whistled softly. "He's grown some! Didn't stop with the Lone Hand?"

"He's worth five million, they say, an' he's runnin' for Governor now," continued Hidreth. "An' see here, Rockcliffe——"

"S—sh! Make it Ayland."

"Sure! It's a fool head I've got. Now, see here Ayland! Gower knew us the moment he saw us, an' he got plumb anxious to get us to help him find you."

There was a look came into Balmy's eyes which men seeing once seldom were eager to see again. Hidreth continued:

"We sent another letter to warn you of that, but I s'pose you'd got started. We sure feel anxious 'bout you. We owe this find to you—all of it! That grub-stake got us here just in time. If we'd been two days later we'd have been too late, for that company had the hills full of prospectors—them scientific fellows, assayers an' such; an' they'd sure have got in first."

Balmy's eyes gleamed at this expression of their gratitude. Then he said carelessly:

"I guess I'd better be piroutin' out of this country. Gower's as keen as they make them. He'll be lookin' for me, sure!"

"He's lookin' for you now! After you left us at the stage he went into eruption with language scand'lous. He allowed he'd get you if it cost him a hundred thousand!"

"Now see here," broke in Taggert. "We struck that company for twenty thousand dollars to bind the deal, an' we got it! Here it is; you take it an' get out. As soon as the deal's cleaned up an' the rest of the cash paid over, we'll settle up your share with you. Savvy?"

Balmy held the roll loosely in his hand and gazed piercingly at the two men, while a curious tinge of pathos came into his eyes.

"This is sure one real nice little ole world!" he muttered in intense earnestness. "Instead of putting the sheriff on to me an' grabbing that five thousand reward, an' getting me away where you wouldn't have to divvy, you hand me this twenty thousand an' promise more. You're sure new ones on me!"

"We don't go back on partners," growled Taggert.

An hour later Balmy was striking south from the camp across the wild, almost trailless mountain. He had changed to a prospector's dress and outfit, and for six days he worked through the canyons and over the ruggedest of ledges till he crossed the divide.

Then he reached Conejos; flashed a big greenback before a brakeman's eyes, and got slipped into an empty box-car bound south. The next day he was across the Rio Grande in Mexico, and from there he sent one letter to the prospectors telling them of his safety, and another to Dyke directing him to ship his mare to El Paso.

A month later he mailed a third letter addressed to Miss Jess Woodruff, Las Vegas. It was short and full of meaning.

I'm reformed, all right. Those prospectors struck it rich the first week, and to-day's express brought me a hundred and fifty thousand good old Yankee dollars as my share. I'm going to buy a big ranch at Hacienda and raise horses and stock.

I've played my last hold-up forever—except one. You'll know about that before long, because you'll be in it.

BALMY.

III

DURING the next ten days Balmy exhibited streaks of energy and expedition which placed him in the class of big business men. He went to Hacienda, closed up the purchase of the big ranch, engaged the foreman to continue for another season and gave orders for rearranging and rebuilding the corrals. He viewed the stock, especially the horses, with all the tumultuous passion of new ownership; planning every moment for improvements in the breeds.

But, in the evenings, smoking in the quietness of the big veranda, his thoughts went as quick as wireless from Hacienda to Las Vegas—from his horses to the girl. Sometimes he would take from a big pocketbook a faded, wrinkled paper and, glancing over it with intense delight, murmur:

"I've sure got him! An' it'll give me a talking-point—as that Denver drummer used to say—with her. A talking-point! An' I want that; some bad!"

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When his affairs at the new ranch were settled for the time, he again crossed the border and went up to Sante Fé; this time by rail. He knew the risk of that, but the few weeks of heavy growth of hair on his face had greatly changed his appearance. And at Sante Fé he was unknown except by name.

He reached that city and sought out the office of Gower, the big mining-operator and candidate for the Governorship. He knew that getting into the presence of such a man in his own office would not be as easy as holding him up on a mountain road, so he wrote on a slip of paper, *"I can give you information as to the whereabouts of Balmy Rockcliffe,"* which secured the interview at once.

Gower looked at him piercingly, and holding up the slip questioned:

"You did not sign any name to this. Who are you?"

"Balmy Rockcliffe!" smiled that gentleman genially.

Gower fell back in his great armchair, white with alarm. Almost instantly his hand shakily reached for the call-button, but a warning movement of Balmy's hand to his hip stopped him.

"Don't do that!" he laughed. "I'm not here on any demand or request for myself. You have nothing whatever to fear. I'm here to do you good. If you don't listen to me your chance for the Governorship won't be worth a blank cartridge! That Thunder River matter is coming up if you don't rope it again!"

Gower pulled himself together and glared savagely. "If you came here to rake up that old affair you'll land just where you belong!"

"I'll have company," grinned Balmy. Then, slipping a paper from his pocketbook, he tossed it across the desk.

"Meander over that, Mr. Gower. It's a copy of something you'll recognize. The original's here, with your signature!" tapping his pocketbook.

The Candidate glanced and again shriveled back in his chair.

"You have the original?" he gasped.

"I sure have! I was with poor Jensen just after that cave-in, an' he told me of that agreement, an' said he had the paper stowed away, but he passed in his checks before he told me where."

"And yet you found it!" growled Gower.

"I sure did," grinned Balmy. "I found it on the man *you* sent to find it! He committed burglary; I committed highway robbery. You'd have heard of this paper before, but I didn't know till lately how I could get at you. Now I know. Jensen had a wife back in Iowa, starving an' waiting for him to pan out something. She's starving to-day, or plumb near it, in the county-house; yet she owns an interest in that Lone Hand mine, according to that agreement; an' you know it! Yet you claimed, right along, that there was no agreement—that the whole mine was yours."

"There were other accounts," stammered Gower, "that you know nothing about."

"Nor you either!" exclaimed Balmy. His genial manner changed and the intense determination in his eyes made the Candidate cower again.

"You'll do the square thing now, or this agreement, with a full yarn of the whole matter, 'll go into the hands of the opposition party. Likewise an' also, copies'll go to that poor wife, or to some one who'll look out for her. Where'll you stand on votes if this thing's exposed?"

The magnate glared at Balmy; then at the wall. He straightened up in his chair and with a lame assumption of some authority demanded:

"How can I make any arrangement with a man of your stamp; an outlaw, with a price upon his head? How do I know that this is not blackmail for your own purpose?"

"You can call it blackmail," grinned Balmy. "I call it a square deal. I'm not asking to handle the money; but I'm telling you to pay it to that poor woman—that pauper, through your devilish trickery!"

The Candidate winced more acutely than he had yet done.

"What do you propose?" he gasped.

"Send her twenty thousand dollars. You can invent whatever reason you please for doing it, but do it at once, an' I'll hand the original agreement and the other papers to you. An' I'm saying now that the proper party to handle this is a little lady in Las Vegas. She's a niece of Mrs. Jensen; an' she's helped that woman all she could out of her little picayune salary. She's a schoolteacher at Las Vegas."

"I don't know what you're doing all this for," growled Gower, "but I'll take care that you don't get any of the money. Be sure of that!"

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"It's pure philanthropy," laughed Balmy, "with a little prize-package on the side."

"I'll send for this lady," said the Candidate. "What is her name?"

"Miss Jess Woodruff. That's the name. Write her a note with some little hint as to the business, an' tell her to come in on the morning train. To-morrow's Saturday, an' she can come. An' I'm plumb eager to be getting back to my ranch."

Gower's eyebrows lifted sarcastically at the mention of a ranch, but he wrote the note and handed it open to Balmy, who read it and smiled.

"Three o'clock to-morrow, eh? See you then, Governor—to be," and with a friendly wave of the hand, he left the office.

IN THE same block with that office was Romney's garage. Balmy sauntered in there, looked at the three or four machines for sale, pointed to a big, powerful 6-50 tourist and inquired:

"How much?"

"Forty-five hundred," was the reply.

"Fill her up an' run her out," commanded Balmy. "She's mine!"

Romney had dealt with ranch and mining men before and knew their ways. In ten minutes Balmy was out on the street; in five minutes after was clear of the town, testing speed and control. At three the next day he switched off his spark outside Gower's office and, lolling back in the seat with his cap pulled down over his eyes, he waited. With him was a messenger-boy from the Sante Fé Hotel. In a few minutes Jessie Woodruff entered the building and went up on the elevator. Balmy handed a package to the boy.

"Follow that lady into Gower's office and give her this. To her; mind you! It must be put in her own hands by you. Take no excuse!"

Jessie had introduced herself to Gower when the boy was brought in. She opened the package and read a letter.

MISS JESSIE WOODRUFF:

Give the enclosed papers to Gower when he gives you $20,000 for your Aunt Jensen. That's the bargain I made with him. If he dodges or makes any objection, wave your handkerchief from the window and I'll be up there.

BALMY ROCKCLIFFE.

Gower's eyes were fixed upon her as she read. He marveled at the flush of red that overspread the cheeks and ears and even the little square of white neck under her lace yoke. Then the eyes cleared, the pretty lips set firmly together and she handed the letter to him.

"This is quite according to our understanding," he agreed. "A purely business matter, Miss Woodruff. My part is all ready."

He was right. In twenty minutes she emerged from the building. Balmy was on the sidewalk and with a short but intensely feeling greeting he asked:

"Is it all right, Miss Woodruff? Did he keep his agreement?"

She nodded; her eyes full of wonder and doubt.

"What does it all mean?" she murmured. "How do you happen to have anything to do with this?"

"I can't explain to you here," he demurred. "Get into my car. We'll have a ride—just a short one—and I'll explain."

"Your car!" and again the questioning eyes filled with doubt.

"Bought and paid for fairly," he smiled.

She got in and, until they were clear of the busy streets, no word was spoken. Then he told her all.

"And you dared to come here and face that man!" she exclaimed. "The very man who has posted five thousand dollars reward for your arrest!"

"It looks like it," he grinned.

"Why?"

The question came as direct as lead from a .44. Its abruptness even embarrassed Balmy.

"Well! You see, I knew poor Jensen when he was prospecting, an' he often spoke of his hard luck an' his poor wife. Naturally, when things came my way, I wanted to see that she was put right."

A gleam of admiration came into her eyes. If Balmy could have looked into them steadily he would also have seen a charming trace of mistiness as he continued:

"And I want to be honest with you. I've reformed, you know. I wanted to see you again."

Instantly she thought of the note he had sent her from Mexico: *"I've played my last hold-up except one. You'll know about that before long, because you'll be in it."* Every muscle in her lithe body stiffened, and the tender sympathy in her eyes hardened into cold suspicion.

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"I must return to the station at once," she commanded. "I am to take the five-fifty train back to Las Vegas."

"This is my last hold-up," smiled Balmy. "An' *I'm* going to take you to Las Vegas. I must, girl! It will be my last chance ever to talk with you—to plead with you. But don't fear! I'm taking you home—your home."

HE THREW in the high speed to settle the matter, and for a few minutes they rode silently. Then he slowed down and with eloquence born of his intense feeling — eloquence which brought tears to her eyes—he urged her to marry him and go to Mexico with him. But she could only shake her head decidedly; her voice she could not trust.

They were twenty miles out of Sante Fé, running slowly through a stretch of timber along a stream. Suddenly a horseman rode out from the brush close ahead and commanded, "Halt!"

A gleaming muzzle emphasized the order.

"The sheriff!" gasped Jessie. As the man wheeled his horse to keep alongside, she threw herself in front of Balmy, grasping the wheel and hissing:

"Down, Balmy! Down!"

She fairly sat upon him, forcing him down, and with lightning movements she threw over the throttle and spark, slipped in the high-speed and the car plunged ahead.

There was another vehement "Halt!" with a shot passing over their heads. Balmy half struggled from where he crouched, exclaiming: "Stop, my girl! Stop, or he'll get you!"

But she held him back with her left hand, and shook her head with a half hysterical scream:

"I'll never stop!"

Another shot rang out, striking the gravel ahead of them. The sheriff was aiming at the tires.

"Keep down, Balmy!" she commanded. "It'll save me. He'll not aim at me!" and in another minute they were out of range.

Balmy straightened up, marveling at the skill and nerve which was putting perhaps seventy miles an hour behind them. Jess glanced at him, her eyes gleaming with riotous excitement.

"We must turn south on the Estancia trail!" she exclaimed. "You dare not go into Las Vegas. Every sheriff in the county is out by this time."

"But you?" he muttered. "You've got to get home!"

"Of course! I'll drop off at Fulton. You'll have to go through there, and I can get a train back. It's a little tank station."

She steered into the Estancia trail and said:

"Take the wheel, please. The road gets rough now."

Then she glanced back and exclaimed:

"There's another car, Balmy! And they've picked up the sheriff. It's to be a chase—a fearful chase over this trail!"

A bad road for deliberate driving—a terror for speed. But Balmy's blood was up and his occasional quick glances at the girl showed him that there was nothing but the same delirious excitement of achievement there. Along the rough crooked foot-hills they rushed, rocking and jolting madly over the ruts; and the speed was not checked.

Balmy's eyes were focused ahead. The veins and sinews in his wrists stood out in great knots as he grasped the wheel. As Jess watched him in adoring admiration she saw the throttle and spark advanced and felt the powerful car spring forward in response. She saw the road rise up before them and melt away beneath them. Here and there, as some great rock loomed up in front, doubling in size each moment as they rushed toward it, the speed was checked slightly. The next instant the turn was made and the throbbing, gasping machine leaped again like a blooded horse under the lash.

Up grade and down there was no cessation, and the scrub cedars whirled down upon them in two swiftly revolving circles, vanishing instantly as they came alongside.

An overwhelming confidence in the sublime power and nerve of Balmy came over the girl. Rushing to certain death as it seemed at every turn, she would not have lifted one finger to check the terrific pace. She was enthralled and intoxicated at the splendid disregard of danger and death. She laughed derisively at the short steep down-grade with unseen peril at its foot. Sitting there by Balmy, she would have taken the fearful plunge into those rocky chasms, yelling in defiance and exultation.

They rushed through Fulton, forgetting Jess's plan to stop off there and take a train back to Las Vegas. So they whirled

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on, the air whistling and howling as they tore into it, drowning even the terrific detonations and rattle of the machine.

To both it was power! Indomitable, inconceivable, unconquerable power! The power of the whirlwind and the maelstrom. All in its path must give way—must stand aside! Naught could stay the progress of this mad, wild, delirious race.

Then the day darkened, and with it came the thought of the night. Balmy slowed down and looked for signs of some ranch-house, but saw none. On their right hand was the range of barren mountains. Off on the left stretched the desert. Ahead was the trail, with all its dangers accented and increased by the gathering gloom.

"We'll have to camp," he muttered at last. "You'll have to trust me, my girl. I dare not go on!"

SHE made no response. The excitement of the race over those foothills had subsided into terror at her position and her future. Balmy steered the car into a clump of cottonwoods and, alighting, walked up among the rocks. Presently he returned.

"There's a good spring," he said. "This is the place!" Then he busied himself with a small camp-fire, drew a package of food from the tonneau and made a pot of coffee. The girl remained cowering in her seat.

"We'll have a little supper," he said cheerily, "and then decide on how to get you back home in the morning. I've sure played my hand wrong, an' you're the sufferer!"

The deep contrition in his tone put some heart into Jess, and some hope. She ate a little and listened to his talk and his plans for her safety in the morning. But she could not respond. Her past seemed to be very dim and distant; the future utterly incomprehensible.

Presently he fastened the storm curtains all around the tonneau, and with gentle respect suggested her resting, throwing a great soft rug across her knees as she took her seat. He did not even offer to touch her hand, but, with a sweep of his hat and a cheery "good night," he left her and went back to the fire.

And she watched him as the night darkened, sitting with his back to a big cottonwood, occasionally smoking a cigarette. Although in the dim light she could only see his silhouetted figure, she knew that he was alert to every sound—to every possibility of danger. Although her burning brain worked sometimes upon her own predicament and peril, it mostly dwelt upon him.

She recalled the story she had heard of his youth; of his father, defrauded of all he possessed; of the mother, dying in abject poverty; of the boy, cast out to follow any bent of circumstances. She thought of his fine courtesy on the two occasions when she had come in contact with him; and of his manly honor on this night, when she was absolutely in his power, miles and miles away from any help.

And mixed with it all was fear; one moment for herself, the next moment for him, should the headlights of a pursuing car gleam along the trail. Once, with a gasp of terror, she saw him spring lightly to his feet and cautiously, silently steal out to the trail. She could not see him there, but she knew that something had alarmed him. But presently he returned as stealthily as an Indian and dropped again by the big cottonwood.

So the night wore on, until across the weird desert came the first gleam of daylight. As it strengthened, Balmy again built a fire, and while he was thus busy the girl slipped from the car, went over to the spring and bathed her face and her poor, weary, beautiful eyes.

They breakfasted quietly. Then Balmy tossed a pan of water over the embers, cranked the machine and, as they took their seats and his foot was on the clutch-lever, he sighed:

"It's back north, I suppose; an' all that that means?"

Her left arm slowly stretched out toward the trail. Two fingers of her right hand rested on his arm, and she whispered:

"It's south, Balmy; south, to Mexico and a new life for both of us!"

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THROUGH THE "NEVER-NEVER LAND" A STORY OF THE AUSTRALIAN BUSH

By L. WARBURTON

FOR years the siren-song of the "Never-Never" had rung in the ears of Price Maurice. He had heard it first when, as a mere boy, spending his school vacation on his father's sheep-station, he had halted his sturdy brumby pony on the sand-plain that marked the northern boundary of "Wirrabarra," and gazed out across the dreary sand and spinifex to where the horizon was lost in the witch-dance of the sun's rays.

Through the years that had passed the call of the mysterious hinterland had awakened a responsive chord in him. Now in his vigorous manhood he stood once more gazing out over the billows of sand, pondering over the mystery he had determined to unveil, and experiencing the same emotions that he had felt when first he stood there.

The Never-Never country of Central Australia; the little-known, unoccupied territory that environed the heart of the continent; the land of the Bunyip; the source of the bushmen's fables; the empire of desert alternating with tracts of the richest grass-country ever seen—it had fascinated him.

It had called to many men, but to none had its voice sounded more seductively than to Price Maurice. None was more fitted to answer it. For years he had been an adventurer, and had risked his life a score of times in the wilds of the earth, or in those sports which strong men count the spice of life.

Now he stood contemplating the fringe of the country that would swallow him up, and keep him hidden from the sight of his fellows for many long months. His plans were made, and merely awaited putting into motion, but impatiently he asked himself the eternal question "What is there?"

"Bah!" he said aloud. "I'll soon know. All women's and children's talk, I suppose, this chatter about warlike blacks, hundreds of miles without water and strange animals. Old Goode doesn't like it, but—— I'll go and find Abkur Khan."

He mounted his horse and rode off.

UNDER the shady branches of a knotted and gnarled gum-tree a man was busy preparing his evening meal at the coals of a slowly dying fire. His face was bearded and swarthy. It was not the darkness that comes to the Caucasian skin by long exposure to the sun and the dry winds that turn white flesh into the texture and shade of saddle-leather. It was the swarthiness that comes from ages of desert progenitors. The man's eyes were black and bright, almost fierce.

His garb was not strange to the bush, though totally un-Australian. His head was swathed in a dirty white cloth, apparently yards long. A richly worked waistcoat encased his sinewy body, giving free play to his long lean arms, the talon-like hands of which busied themselves with mixing the food in a tin dish over which he squatted. His trousers were loose and thin.

Abkur Khan was making "chupattis," the bread of the Afghan camel-driver.

Close by in the scrub the hobbled camels nosed among the undergrowth for their food. Depending from the green-hide straps

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around their necks the riveted iron bells clanked and clanked. Abkur Khan looked up through the odorous gum-bark smoke that wreathed about his tawny face, and saw the sun was low on the western horizon.

Rising, he walked to the dam, drank deeply and laved his face and hands. Returning to his camp-fire he pulled his praying-mat from the camel-pack, spread it on the ground away from the fallen branches and twigs of the tree, and fell on his knees.

Thrice he lowered his head to the ground, intoning his prayer to Allah.

"Allah is good! Allah is God!"

The sun dropped below the rim of the plain while Abkur Khan, the faithful, bowed his head low between his outstretched palms. The stamp of a horse's hoof barely interrupted his devotions, and he rose to find himself watched by a big man who sat motionless in the saddle. For a moment he gazed, plainly ill-tempered at the intrusion upon his evening prayers by an infidel white man. He walked back to his fire, raked out the ashes and, placing his chupattis in the pan, proceeded to toast them. The visitor calmly dismounted and turned his horse loose.

"Good evening to you, my Afghan friend. May I sit with you and talk?"

"I give you greeting, white man," the Afghan answered, "though I know you not. Whether thou sittest or standest, talk or are silent, none of these things concern me."

The white man smiled, seated himself on the opposite side of the coals, and in silence watched the camel-driver cook his food.

Presently he spoke in a strange tongue. Abkur Khan raised his head, and gazed at the stranger fixedly.

"Thou knowest the language of my country? Who are you?"

"I am Price Maurice. You are camped on my land. I own the station here, but you are welcome. And you are Abkur Khan?"

The Afghan nodded.

"I have lived in your country, Abkur," continued the white man. "I spent many long months there beyond the Kiber, hunting the bear, the jackal and the hyena. Your countrymen named me 'The man without fear.' Oh, I don't call myself that, but Tagh Mahomet, son of Faiz the Ameer's jeweler——"

"You are friend to Tagh Mahomet who left his bazaar by the road to Kabul to hunt with the Afridis?"

Abkur Khan was strangely interested.

"Tagh Mahomet is my friend, Abkur. A mighty hunter," replied Maurice.

The Afghan salted the chupattis which burned on the pan, pulled one out, broke it and offered a portion to the white man. Their friendship was pledged by the act.

"The friend of Tagh Mahomet is my friend," he said, "Price Mareese will eat with me."

Maurice took the salted bread and ate.

"What is it you wish of me?" asked the camel-driver.

Maurice told the Afghan of his desire to journey across the great interior, along a trail no white man had yet taken, and be the first man to win the honor of traveling from the head of the great salt Lake Torrens to the Arafura Sea.

He outlined his plans for the pilgrimage. They included the use of camels to cross the waterless tracts. The Afghan nodded his head reflectively.

"You do this for honor alone?" he asked.

"Well, there's nothing else in it, Abkur, but you shall be well-paid."

"I? What have I to do with your plans, this mad pilgrimage through the unknown you speak of?"

"You go with me Abkur; you and one other," said the white man. "All men out here know you can travel through the dry stages when the drought has made the plains a wilderness like the Sahara. They say you and your camels can find water where none other can; or your beasts can go without it, and live while horses perish. You must come and share with me the honor I seek among the men whose praise is more precious even than the wealth you look for in this country. You will join me?"

"This other? Who is he? What is his name?"

"A tribesman from the interior," answered the squatter, "a savage truly, but a man who knows the land and will help us with his people. On the station they call him, after his people, 'Arunta Jack.'"

The Afghan ate in silence for many minutes, while Maurice studied his face and waited for an answer. To the success of his enterprise he considered camels and a competent man to handle them essential. The difficulty, he knew, was to get an Afghan to venture so far from the regular stock routes.

In Abkur Khan he had found the man whom reputation represented as the most

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venturesome of the camel-drivers—a man who never abandoned the track when the droughts had made travel impossible for others. Maurice also counted himself exceedingly fortunate in finding in the man a sworn friend of his old "shikaree," what time he was hunting in the mountain fastnesses of the Indian frontier. If only Abkur Khan would accompany him, success would already be half won.

The Afghan called to the straying camels, then turned his eyes to the expectant face of his visitor.

"I will go with you, Price Mareese," he said. "How fares it with my old friend, Tagh Mahomet?"

MAURICE expressed his pleasure at the Afghan's decision, and talked gaily for an hour about his old shikaree. He bade Abkur farewell, and rode back under the stars to the station homestead. The old manager was waiting for him.

"Its all right, Goode," said Maurice. "My plans are all fixed now, and I'll start in a week's time. Abkur Khan is coming with me, and will get four of the finest riding-camels to be had, and bring his best two pack-beasts as well."

"You're going to take a 'Ghan with you, sir?" asked the manager in surprise.

"Yes, Goode, it's the safest way. They know how to manage the camels. That's been the trouble with other men who have gone out there and never come back. First they tried horses. They knocked up and died of thirst. Then others tried camels, and had to shoot the brutes because they didn't know how to work them. I'm not making that mistake. Anyway, what the —— are you so serious about, old man?"

"I don't like it, sir," said Goode, shaking his head. "The black-boy's all right. You can trust him. I've trained him myself, and there's no nonsense about my training. He hasn't been well-treated enough to be spoiled, and not badly enough to be spiteful. You can belt the hide off him if he deserves it, or praise him if he don't. He's used to a fair deal, and he'll do anything for me or for you now you're going to take him. It's the 'Ghan I don't like. You can't trust 'em."

"What rot, Goode! I know the Afghans in their own country. They're all right. Rare fighters and workers. Besides, I've eaten salt with Abkur, and that settles our friendship."

"Maybe, Mr. Maurice. You've seen 'em in other parts, but that ain't the bush. Have you ever seen 'em run amuck? I have. Out in the bush they get melancholy, and go mad. Maybe you only speak roughly to 'em, and before you know where you are, they're on you with a knife or an ax. When a mad Afghan is loose, with blood in his eyes, foam on his lips and a weapon in his hands, it's God help even his best friends! I've seen 'em that way, sir, and—I've shot 'em! It isn't murder. It's self-defense and kindness."

"What a cheerful customer you are, Goode!" laughed Maurice. "First you tell me I'm mad to go into the Never-Never at all, and now you tell me I'm as good as dead because I'm going to take one poor solitary Afghan. Maybe when I come back safe and sound you won't believe it's me but my ghost. Eh?"

"I'll be the first to grip your hand, sir. I hope you'll come through all right. I believe you will. You're going well-armed, I know, but here——"

Goode pulled open a table-drawer and brought out a Colt automatic of heavy caliber.

"Take that, Mr. Maurice, and promise me you'll always have it handy. Men leave their rifles about, and get killed because they haven't got 'em when they most need 'em. Keep that in your pocket always. Dodge the blacks if you can, and watch Abkur Khan. I've given you all the advice I can. Now I'm off to bed. God bless you!"

"Good night, Goode; thank you for the shooter and your advice. I'll remember it." The young man gripped the hand of his old manager who had served his own father so well.

"A decent old chap, but getting nervous," he said to himself when Goode had retired.

II

ACROSS the head of the great salt pan that appears on the map as Lake Torrens, and suggests to the casual glance a huge inland sea, a caravan progressed slowly. The broad feet of the camels crunched and screwed in the dazzling salt-encrusted sand. Occasionally were seen the whitened fossil remains of extinct marsupial mammoths. No vestige of vegetable life was found. Even the spiky spinifex had disappeared.

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An eagle-hawk sailed majestically overhead. For days he had followed the caravan, as though determined to be in at the death he knew must overtake the venturesome strangers toiling through his domains.

Price Maurice, Abkur Khan and Arunta Jack were ten days out from Wirrabarra Station, heading for the Stuart Ranges. When another few miles had been traversed they would have passed the first desert that separates the Never-Never from the land of rolling grass and browsing sheep.

That night they camped on the edge of the lake, and the black boy guided Maurice to a little water-hole known only to the natives.

So far, everything had gone well. The water supplies had proved ample; the camels had stood the test of days on the lake, without a blade of grass to eke out the meager allowance of date-cake fed to them by Abkur Khan. There had been no sign of troublesome natives, and man and beast were fitter than ever.

In light heart Maurice broke camp in the morning, and steered a straight course for the distant hills and beyond, a course that would bring him out on Cambridge Gulf at the end of his two-thousand-mile journey across the center of the continent. The country began to improve as they left the lake behind them. Sand gave place to shallow loam, and spinifex to trees of moderate height. Signs of game were met with, and as they progressed many a fat kangaroo fell to the black-boy's rifle.

With feed in plenty and water at reasonable intervals on the march, the expedition made long stages. At the end of another week the low well-bushed peaks of the Stuart Ranges came in sight. Maurice was riding well ahead when his eyes fell on a column of dense smoke that ascended almost without a curl from the distant foot-hills. The black-boy came riding up to him.

"T'inkit, boss," he said in his pigeon English, "black-fella make um smoke. Watch um boss, or make it plenty trouble. No good that one fella," and the astute Jack wagged his head wisely at the sign of potential danger.

"That's all right, Jack," Maurice answered. "We won't be caught asleep. You keep your eyes open for black-fellows, and we'll camp as soon as we strike water. If they show fight, we'll handle them."

A few minutes later smokes were seen in several directions, and Maurice recognized in them the signals of which Goode had told him. They were in the country of a warlike tribe who were signaling to their scattered members the approach of strangers.

They might or might not mean mischief, but the warning fires demanded the exercise of caution. Day was waning when the caravan entered a mulga-thicket.

Maurice had Abkur Khan close up his team and, taking Jack with him, he rode warily ahead, the camels having in places to smash their way through the undergrowth.

"Boss!"

The black-boy plucked at Maurice's arm and spoke in a whisper.

"Black-fella walkabout longa 'ere. See 'em track this way. Bimeby see um black-fella."

As though apprehending immediate danger, he unslung his rifle and carried it easily across his knees. Maurice nodded his understanding of the situation, and pressed on. They came to the edge of an open space where the iron outcrops denied an existence to timber.

A big naked warrior stood in the open as the party broke through the scrub, his poised spear menacing further advance.

"Hullo there," Arunta Jack called in his native tongue. "Don't throw that spear, or we shoot and kill with the weapons of the white man that do not fail. What tribe are you? Whence come you?"

The black planted his spear in the ground at the sound of a native voice and replied in guttural accents. He was an Apinga, a distant branch of the big Arunta family. He was a member of a hunting-party and, having seen the approach of strangers, had signaled the main body of the tribe to send the women back into the hills. Uttering a call, he summoned his fellows to him.

They were not painted, Maurice was glad to see, and accordingly were not out for strife. But the white man had no doubt that, if they could do it with impunity, they would not hesitate to attack the expedition.

He instructed Jack to tell them that he was on a peaceful mission, and would soon pass through the hunting-ground of the Apingas without harming them, but at the first sight of treachery he would kill every black-fellow within a day's march.

The natives nodded and disappeared. Maurice led the way once more into the scrub, and prayed that he might soon pass

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through it. He felt uneasy and feared an attack when he was not in a position to meet it. He hurried on. To his relief the thicket terminated abruptly. He had just spied a suitable place to camp beside a brackish soak when there was a wild shout from Abkur Khan, and a maddened camel bolted through the team with a spear hanging in its haunch.

Jack dashed after the wounded beast, and Maurice turned in his tracks in time to drop a black who had sent half a dozen spears after the rest of the herd, and from the edge of the thicket was aiming another.

"The treacherous devils!" shouted Maurice, "They mean mischief after all! They'll stampede the camels. Quick, Abkur, we must camp here and stand their attack."

THE Afghan hurried the camels on to the camping-place. At the sharp command of "Hooshta!" they dropped to their knees. The packs were hastily released and piled as a breastwork between two tree-trunks. Behind some rocks the water-bags were carefully placed where they were not likely to be riddled with spears, for, though there was water handy, Maurice would leave nothing to chance, and the chance was that the blacks would cover the local water-supply.

Leaving Abkur to prepare the evening meal, and bidding Jack keep his eyes "skinned," Maurice attended to the wounded camel, which was bellowing with pain. It was his spare riding-beast, now out of commission for many weeks, with a barbed spear in its quarters. No amount of tugging or working would release the spear, and when the beast threatened to "savage" him, Maurice gave up the attempt.

"We'll trust to luck it isn't poisoned," he said as he sawed through the shaft as close to the barb as he could get. "That's the first bit of trouble, Jacky. Your friends don't intend it to be the last."

"No fear, boss. Black-fella make 'em corroboree. Paint um to-night. You look out that fella trouble in mornin'. They kill me, too. Me steal 'em Apinga *lubra* long time ago. Black-fella remember me," and the dusty rake grinned.

"That's it, is it?" said Maurice. "You've been a gay devil in your time? Run away with a woman of the other tribe? I'll swear Goode didn't know that or he wouldn't have let you come out here to bring the whole family down on us. You've got to fight for your life now, my boy!"

"Winchester 'im beat spear, my oath," was the only observation the black made.

The attack came with the first distinguishable haze of dawn, after the manner of the Australian aborigines. Lying behind a rock waiting, with his shotgun loaded in both chambers, his rifle handy and Goode's revolver in his pocket, Maurice had heard the wild corroboree of the natives when they worked themselves into a frenzy for the fight. It was he who caught the sound of pattering feet among the bush tinder, and he roused the peacefully sleeping Abkur Khan.

Presently there was a whir of flying spears, followed by a rush of bare feet. A dozen bedaubed warriors came tearing from the scrub. The white man emptied his Express, and Jack pumped the lead from his Winchester into the charging natives.

There was a wild yell of pain and rage. Three dusky forms tore at the grass in their death-struggles. Surprised by such a reception, the blacks turned and bolted back to the scrub.

"Pretty good for a start, Jacky," cried Maurice. "Load up again. Abkur, reserve your fire. They'll be on us again in a minute. Then let 'em have it! I wish the light would come quicker!"

The natives could be heard conversing excitedly in the bush. Then from the safety of the adjacent timber the spears came in a shower, thudding into the camel-packs and sending sparks flying from the rocks when they struck.

The natives were in greater strength than the dozen Maurice had faintly seen and, deluded by their immunity from fire, they charged again and were beaten back once more. The rifle grew hot under the white man's rapid fire, and Goode's automatic sounded with telling effect.

"Hold them there, Abkur, while we load!" yelled Maurice. "Now they mean business."

For the third time the blacks dashed in, and spears, boomerangs and waddies descended in a cloud on the hard-pressed camp. Every weapon had been discharged, including the shotgun, and though the ground was covered with the fallen foe, the more desperate of the warriors came on for a hand-to-hand contest. Maurice clubbed two with the butt of his rifle, while Abkur,

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with the border-fighter's lust for slaughter in his eyes, smote right and left with the scrub-ax.

Jacky seized a waddy that lay at his feet and, standing by his master, gave Maurice time to thrust a couple of cartridges into the shotgun and discharge the weapon pointblank into the cluster of savages who menaced him.

In the breaking dawn the face of the native chief turned to a bloody pulp, and he pitched forward at the white man's feet. The fierceness of the resistance and the loss of their leader broke the fighting spirit of the tribe.

For the third and last time they turned and fled.

Then, in the dawn mist, Maurice had time to survey his losses. The open stretch between his camp and the scrub from which the blacks had made their attack was strewn with dead and wounded men. Jacky's thick skull ached and his scalp ran blood from a waddy blow that would have finished any one but a savage. Abkur stood motionless. In his eyes the wild light of battle still blazed, and his hand gripped the ax, red from the blade to where the talon-like fingers held the shivered handle.

A graze that smarted and stung Maurice's left shoulder told him how very narrowly he had escaped being clean transfixed by a spear.

The fighting force of the expedition had escaped serious injury. Not so the noncombatants. One of the camels was stuck so full of flint-headed spears that Maurice promptly shot it. Another was badly, though not hopelessly, wounded. When his inspection was complete the white man shook his head ruefully at the havoc among his transport. One beast dead, two seriously hurt and the other three injured more or less, was not inspiriting to the man who had hardly begun the serious portion of his journey.

He gave the word to pack everything on the camels that could be worked, and march on.

"This place won't be fit for us to stay in when the sun has been up a few hours," he said, "even if the blacks don't come back with reinforcements. I reckon that particular lot won't worry us again this trip, but we'll lose no time getting to a place where Jacky's offense against tribal law isn't known."

III

FOR three days the expedition traveled with slow and painful progress, till the Stuart Ranges were out of sight, and a permanent water-hole presented an oasis where the camels might be rested and doctored. Then, the natives reappearing, Maurice struck boldly out across another stretch of barren country. It was ribbed like the seashore by a never-ending succession of sand-ridges, a country so inhospitable and hopeless that the explorer was scarce surprised when he found in its bosom the straggling remnant of some forgotten race of mankind.

There were not more than a score of these people; wretched, shriveled creatures whose guttural mutterings suggested the earliest efforts of primitive man to converse with his fellows. In all probability they were the last of a race driven into the desert by the savages—prehistoric in their origin as well—who now claimed the richer lands, and eked out an existence on grubs, lizards and whatever sustenance they derived from the roots of the scattered bush.

They fled at the sight of the party, and when the white man and the black-boy rode after them they threw themselves on their faces, afraid to look at the terrible four-footed beasts on which the strangers rode. Unarmed, they presented no new danger to the invaders of their territory, and after ascertaining from them by signs where water was to be had, Maurice hurried on.

So the months passed, the expedition lost to human ken in the great interior, moving slowly toward the distant ocean. They traversed a great variety of country, some of it well-grassed and liberally supplied with deep pools of slightly brackish water, or containing in cavernous rock-holes sheltered from the sun vast reservoirs of beautiful cool water in which protean animals or colorless fishes swam.

The black-boy gravely informed Maurice that in these pools dwelt the bunyip, or mythical dragon of the natives, which dragged his slimy body from the depths and came forth to devour men. Into one of these caverns Maurice descended through a cleft in the rocks. A beam of light revealed a subterranean lake of unguessable depth. Great white-eyed toads peered curiously at the white man as he fell on his knees and drank deeply. Gargantuan bats beat their

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wings excitedly about the intruder's head. Maurice was probably the first of human kind to taste at the hidden fountain. It was sufficient to provide a year's supply for a city. Yet, scarcely a mile from the hidden entrance, lay the skeleton of some lonely overlander who had probably died of thirst.

While Abkur Khan and the black-boy laboriously hauled water for the camels and replenished the water-bags, the leader of the expedition built a cairn at the entrance to the reservoir, and carved on the biggest tree-trunk directions for finding the water.

He counted his day well-spent when, on the morrow, looking back across the plain, he saw the rock-pile boldly advertising to any one within a dozen miles that it was the work of human hands, and realized that by so much labor and sweat had the way of the wanderer in the Never-Never been made easier.

It was six months after leaving Wirrabarra Station that the expedition came out on the sand and spinifex which, as Maurice believed, marked the last two hundred miles of the Never-Never. Right through the heart of the country he had come, traversing desert and fair land, and encountering all dangers.

He had made the acquaintance of many tribes of natives. Some had been friendly. Others had barred his progress or impeded his retreat from their inhospitality. He had had numerous scrimmages, and more than once a pitched battle had been fought. The presence in the party of a natural enemy had underlain several desperate attacks on the expedition, the natives seeming to scent a victim for their tribal hatred in the unfortunate Arunta Jack.

Maurice had had to extract a spear from the "boy's" leg on one occasion. Then, a native had entered the camp alone, and professed great friendship. He had walked from the camp to where he had dropped his weapons on entering it, and in a flash sent a spear at the man on whom he had really been spying.

Jacky had received the full force of the blow, the spear-head protruding through his limb. It was so barbed that Maurice had to draw the full length of it through the wound. The native bore the pain unflinchingly, and wanted to be off after his assailant when his wound was dressed.

He contented himself for the nonce with pursuing the other savage with all the oaths gleaned during an educative acquaintance with the shearing-shed when Maurice threatened to thrash the hide off him if he left camp.

Some portion of the threat was carried out later when the "Boss" found that the blackfellow had pulled the bandages from his wound, plugged it with white clay after the manner of his tribe and, having painted himself, was breaking for the scrub with his Winchester at the trail.

In passing through a belt of poison-country Maurice lost two camels which had nibbled at the deadly "heart-leaf" and failed to respond to treatment. The explorer's transport was now reduced to three beasts, weakened by sickness and their old wounds. Although Maurice rested them well before tackling the last desert-area, it was all they could do to carry the full water-bags. The three men had to walk most of the time.

According to all that had been told him of the overland trip the white man knew he must face this, the worst stage of his venture. There was no skirting it. He might cross the northern desert at its narrowest part, and yet have a two-hundred-mile journey. Most likely he would travel three hundred, and lucky would he be if he found water of any sort fit to drink. It might be that there was no water at all on the route which he faced when he left the grass country.

In that case he could rely only on what supplies his weak camels could carry, and make a dash for the timbered uplands of the Kimberley region, where, if he could pass safely through the territory of the most warlike blacks, his dangerous journey would be ended.

Long he pondered and delayed, hesitating to leave the water-hole at which he had rested his beasts. He even made a flying trip some distance into the desert, hoping to find a well or soak that would by so much shorten the stage over which he would have to carry water. No such oasis presented itself in the monotonous expanse of hopeless country, and at last in desperation he saddled up one night and led the way out to the wilderness.

For hours the men marched silently. When they camped in the blazing sun they drank sparingly. The camels were not watered. For five days they tasted no liquid. Then they bellowed for it, and Abkur Khan signed to Maurice that the moment had come when they must be watered. Half the supplies were gone before

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the Afghan ceased filling the canvas bucket for the still thirsty beasts.

"Allah!" he cried, "how they thirst! They have fared too well since last we saw the desert. Now must they taste not till we call on them for a mad race for our lives, and travel day and night for water."

"That's it, Abkur," said Maurice. "We've seen no sign of water yet. Jacky says it isn't here, so we've just got to get through."

"Allah is good; we are his children," the Afghan replied with Moslem fatalism.

He seldom spoke much, and of late had almost entirely addressed himself in monosyllables to his camels.

Another five days passed without a sign of the desert ending; without a cupful of stagnant water being obtained. The camels, sparingly fed on the date-cake which was carried for them, made poor progress, but at the end of the tenth day Maurice estimated that he was more than half way through the desert, and prevailed on Abkur Khan to let the beasts have another drink.

Another week passed. The strain of the journey was telling on both man and beast now. Maurice's keen gray eyes looked out of haggard wrinkled hollows, and even his beard failed to hide his starved cheeks.

He was calm and cool, however, as he braced himself for the final dash. Arunta Jack's waist-belt showed an unusual length of flapping leather beyond the buckle. The Afghan was silent and moody, and Maurice noted with alarm that he kept muttering to himself.

"Give the beasts the rest of their share of the water, Abkur," said the leader. "We'll drop everything now, and go night and day till we get out of this awful place and strike some kind of water."

"Allah holds us in his hands," muttered the Afghan, and mechanically obeyed the order.

IV

THEN began a race with Death in close pursuit. For two days and nights the party hurried on, scarcely stopping long enough to rest the beasts and dole out the meager pint of water for each man. On the third night they halted at dusk, still out of sight of the smoky blue hills for which their tired eyes had so long hungered. In the water-bag strapped to Maurice's saddle there was barely another decent drink, and the white man sternly shook his head when Abkur Khan, through cracked and bleeding lips, begged his next day's share.

The Afghan went off muttering, and Maurice threw himself down beside the saddle to snatch a few hours' sleep. He slumbered lightly, dreaming of green fields and running streams. Toward morning he was roused by the stirring of the camel-driver, who was rummaging among the packs. Uneasily Maurice rose and gazed about him. The water-bag, which he would have sworn had still been attached to the saddle when night fell, lay on the sand. It looked strangely empty, and Maurice, a storm of fear in his brain, hastily snatched it up and shook it.

It was empty! A solitary drop fell from the mouth as he tilted it.

"My ——!" he exclaimed, "Abkur has done this," and he stepped wildly to where the Afghan lay huddled up beside the camels.

"Abkur Khan," he said, his voice pregnant with suppressed rage, "men have been killed for twenty times less a crime than you have committed this night. You have stolen the water! Are you man or swine that you should, under cover of night, rob those who share with you the perils of the desert? Speak, you dog, whom I trusted when I chose you to be my comrade! I believed that in a friend of Tagh Mahomet I would find a man like him; not that worst of jackals—a man so vile that he steals the sustenance of his sworn friends."

The Afghan gazed at Maurice with a fierce look in his eyes. For a moment he faced the white man. Then he dropped his eyes.

"Price Mareese is just, even when his tongue lashes like the ten-thonged whip of the slave-driver," he said. "Abkur Khan was mad, and knew not what he did when thirst drove his lips to the water and kept them there till its pangs were satisfied. Now the slave bids his master do with him what he wills. He does not ask forgiveness."

"Bah! I could kill you, but that would do me no good! Unless we find water soon we shall all perish, and you must die with us. You shall not escape the tortures of thirst, and that you would do if I shot you now, you Pariah."

As Maurice had truly said, men had been

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killed in the bush for lesser crimes than stealing water, and, saith the bush-law, perhaps he should have killed the Afghan on the spot. The white man little knew what was surging in the camel-driver's disordered brain when his speech was all of gratitude and self-condemnation. Abkur Khan was crazed, and the stinging rebuke administered when his theft was discovered only tended to make his madness worse, though his tongue betrayed no sign of it.

MAURICE left Abkur Khan and walked out to the rising ground whereon he hoped to glimpse the wooded country for which he desperately longed. Already brooding over the white man's scorn the Afghan began to plan revenge, and gazed about him for a weapon. His eyes fell on a heavy revolver that lay in a holster on the leader's saddle. He plucked it out.

"Infidel dog!" he muttered, "must a son of the faithful be spurned and scorned of men, and accept it humbly? We die here in the desert. It is Allah's will, but shall Abkur Khan perish like a beast beside the man who has called him unclean, and hungers to see him suffer untold torture? No; Price Mareese shall die by the hand of the man he has spat upon. He shall never leave this spot."

There was a shot. Then a second and a third.

Maurice was returning to camp when he heard them. Running at his top speed the white man was in time to see Abkur Khan rushing toward one of the camels that had strayed in search of food and water. In full pelt after him followed the black-boy, ax in hand. Jacky was almost on the Afghan, who was still some distance from the camel, when Abkur Khan faced about and fired. The black toppled over, his knee shattered by a ball from the revolver.

So! The Moslem had run amuck!

In his frenzy for blood he had been killing the camels when the native had interfered.

The white man rushed across the sand to save the last beast. Abkur Khan saw him coming. Foaming at the mouth, his long unturbaned hair streaming behind him, the Afghan turned from the black-fellow, who was making desperate efforts to rise, and flew at the principal object of his insane desire for revenge.

The white man stopped abruptly, a hundred yards from the maniac. Hurriedly his hand sought his coat-pocket. Thank God! True to his promise to Goode, the automatic was where the old manager had urged him to keep it always.

Maurice's fingers closed about it, and pulled it forth. Calmly he waited the onslaught of the madman, who raced at him still flourishing the revolver that had done so much damage and brandishing a long knife in his left hand.

Seventy! Fifty! Thirty yards! Maurice never flinched; never hastened.

Like a statue he stood before the charging murderer. He had shot tigers in the jungle and knew how to wait for the moment when the first shot told.

The Afghan was within fifteen paces when the revolver came slowly up to the "Present." The cool eye of the explorer alined the sight with the center of the madman's forehead.

A few more strides and the two men would be together.

Maurice pressed the trigger for the fraction of a second. Abkur Khan sped on, thrusting wildly at the air with his knife, and plunged dead at the white man's feet.

V

WITH his wounded leg roughly bandaged, Arunta Jack sat groaning on the swaying back of the sole camel remaining. Holding the nose-cord loosely in his hand, Price Maurice trudged wearily ahead, stumbling over the sand and tussocks of shriveled spear-grass. For twelve hours the mournful procession had toiled thus, striving and struggling to get out of the desert toward the fairer country beyond.

Maurice's tongue was thick and swollen. His eyes were balls of fire before which danced the tantalizing mirages of tree-fringed lakes and cool bowers of green. At intervals the exhausted camel fell on its knees to rest, and the white man expended his strength in kicking it to make it rise and plod on.

Toward the end of the long and bitter day he became light-headed, and scarcely noted the changing character of the country. He was singing a childish song—or thought he was, for his voice had left him—when a harsh tongue broke in on his music.

It was the voice of the wounded black calling to him:

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"Boss! See! White-fella make um smoke."

Maurice dimly saw a blur of ridge and scrub. The black-fellow was seeing things. The fool. *He* had seen trees, and lakes, and luscious fruits, for hours past. What was smoke to him? But he must keep on, and he tugged at the cord, and hummed his song again.

The black-fellow was calling again, and the camel was hastening on. It was the beast's last effort. It staggered, blundered into a spiky bush and fell. Maurice beat it about the head with his fists. It would not rise. He kicked it. He laughed, but the laughter choked in his throat. He wanted to sleep. Why not? Under him his legs crumpled, and he fell.

Strange, there was no harshness in the fall! Why, of course! Water was beneath and around him. He plunged and swam in it. He drank buckets of it, and for hours he sported and gamboled in it. Then he grew tired, and slept.

When he awoke, the lake beside which he had lain down to sleep was gone. In its place was the scrub, such scrub as he had not seen for months. His hand went out weakly and touched the trunk of a big tree under which he had been lying. His throat ached horribly, and his mouth was filled with something hot and uncomfortable. It was his tongue, which protruded from between his teeth. Then he had not drunk at all? Where was he? What did it mean? He was still on the desert, he thought, when he collapsed and dreamed all those pleasant dreams, and yet here he was in timbered country. He was not mad. No, he could remember clearly. The camel had fallen. Yes there it was. Where was Jack?

A man came crawling to his side and spoke:

"Water, boss."

Maurice gazed weakly. Jacky was there, offering him a pannikin. He could not grasp it, and the native held it tilted to his lips.

A few drops of slimy liquid trickled over his tongue and found their way into his mouth. It hurt him to swallow. How long he was drinking he could not tell. Presently the native left him, and through weary eyes Maurice saw him crawl painfully to the bole of a grotesque-looking tree, and thrust the pannikin out of sight against the roots.

He came back a minute or two later, and again Maurice drank slowly. His tongue moved this time, and he strove to speak, but could not. Again he slept and dreamed; always of water. Some one was shooting now, and Maurice stirred again. It was growing dark, but, gazing about him, he saw the native holding the rifle, which still smoked.

He wanted to speak, and ask what the shooting was about, but his tongue refused duty, and gratefully he drank again from the hands of the black fellow. Some minutes passed, and out of the bush rode three white men. Dismounting, they came over to where he lay, and in his clearest senses now, he heard them say,

"Poor devil, he's had a bad time of it. We'd better get him in to the out-station. The black boy's about all in, too, but he's saved his boss's life."

They spoke the truth. Maurice had pulled the black-fellow out of the desert, and when he had collapsed within the belt of country which he had striven to reach, the native had laboriously and painfully crawled to a baobab-tree and, digging at its roots with a stick, had secured the stored-up water that had prompted the white man's dreams and saved his life. Then he had attracted the attention of the mustering-gang from Hall's Creek Station by firing his rifle, and Maurice had been brought in to civilization once more.

"JACK," he said, a day or two later, when under the kind treatment of the station-hands he was able to walk to the hut where the native was having his leg mended, "I've got something to tell you. When Abkur Khan plugged you in the leg out there in the desert, and there was one camel left and no water, I was tempted to take the camel and leave you to die. I'm glad I wasn't mad enough to forget I was a man, and you were my mate. I didn't do it. Now I reckon we're about quits. You've saved my life. God knows how you did it, but you did it. You're the best mate a man could have. We've been through the Never-Never. Shake hands, old man!"

The native hardly understood. Being a simple savage he could not be expected to, but he took the proffered hand, and grinned.

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THE COST OF THE BATTLE-LUST

THE REAL EXPERIENCES OF A REAL INSURRECTO

by FRED VINCENT WILLIAMS

THE battle was lost. Even the most sanguine of Mosby's daredevils admitted that. So, after the manner of their kind, they broke the firing-line into a hundred pieces and bunched in twos and threes scattered broadcast over the sun-baked, cactus-clad hills—soldiers of fortune, insurrectos of Mexico no longer; merely men, who had broken the laws of a land and were fleeing for their lives.

It had but one object in view—this fighting-machine broken into bits, that had taken up the cause of a country other than its own—and that was to cross the American border and there seek the protection of the Stars and Stripes, under whose folds every mother's son of its soldiery had been born.

My bunkie and I were on the left flank when the crash came. Something hit that left flank and melted it, twisted and distorted it like so much steel put to the flame. I did not realize what it was at the time, but I do now. It was a battery, a living, breathing incarnation of hell in the shape of machine-guns, handled by men who knew how to use them.

Our wing of the army melted in its hot breath. Men who had fought standing, kneeled. Men who kneeled, lay down. I, being already down, tried to bury myself in the bosom of Mother Earth and, Mother Earth being baked adobe in that particular spot, I took to my heels.

It was the beginning of the end. Everybody was running, so what was the use of remaining? They were ten to one against us, this enemy, and artillery to boot. Besides, our old-fashioned single-loading Springfields were being pitted against repeating-rifles of the latest pattern. And the ammunition was running low.

Even thus I reasoned as I ran, pell-mell, for the border, four long miles away. In my fancy there loomed before me the fate of our wounded at Tecate and the bloodletting of the Alamo.

Somebody gripped the toe of my boot and I sprawled headlong into cactus and rocks. It was a wounded comrade, an American like myself, only a boy at that, whose ruddy face I had often seen at our troop mess or over some neighboring campfire of Baja California.

His shoulder had been shot away. A leg was crushed below the knee. There was no hope for his life, but he wanted to be taken away.

"For God's sake, don't leave me, pal!" he cried. "They'll burn me, they'll kill me slow," he moaned.

For a moment I was stunned by the fall,

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but the boy's pathetic appeal brought me to my senses and burned into my brain where it will forever remain.

I looked around me. There were wounded men, most of them boys, clutching at their fleeing comrades, beseeching them not to leave them to the mercy of the Mexican *rurales*.

Yet these were men whom I had seen cheerfully face death many times, men who had enlisted in a foreign cause unafraid to die in battle, but standing ever in mortal terror of the torture-chambers on the battle-fields of Mexico.

THE DEATH-RAIN

FOR a moment my manhood returned and the massacre-fear left me. I would shoulder this maimed bit of humanity, stagger to the line with my burden, over those cruel, never-ending hills which I must scale with my charge before we reached safety.

I staggered to my feet, but the zip-zip of the "dum-dums," those same "dum-dums" that had crippled this boy, brought me back to a realization of my peril.

An instant I faltered in hoisting him to my back, but the boy seemed to divine my change of heart. He gripped me again, this time with a dying man's clutch which I could not and would not shake off unless I broke his arm.

So I shouldered the bleeding little figure and labored forward, the while he murmured, "Good boy, good boy," and the bullets of the Federals ever hissed and screeched in my ears.

Something rose up in my path. It barred my progress. It was shattered by shot—a human form—scarce recognizable now for the blood that stained it from head to foot. But a voice husky with pain and terror begged me not to leave him.

I fled from this dying man as I fled from the enemy. Dodged him as he reached for me. As I passed from his reach he tottered back on the ground with a cry of despair that left with me another memory.

My legs were growing numb from the exertion of it all. Ahead of me fled the Army, or what was left of it. Behind me echoed the wail of the wounded, the *vivas* of the victorious Federals, the hiss and scream of their bullets. Ever-present was the memory of the Alamo and Tecate, where our wounded and those of our fellows taken prisoners had experienced living hells before death relieved them of their torment.

On and on I stumbled, falling now and then, but always regaining my feet and never losing my burden. It had ceased to urge me forward, this maimed bit of boyhood, but its lone arm still encircled my neck with a vise-like grip that at times made it almost impossible to breathe.

Sounds of the battle left me now. I no longer saw men. I dared not stop, however, for fear of not being able to rise again, but at last I stumbled and fell with my burden for the last time. For a long time I remained on the ground, breathing heavily and resting.

How sweet that rest was. I cared not for Federal *soldado* or *rural*. Let them come! I would sleep. The weight slipped from my back and I breathed freer. I must have lain there for an hour. When I arose the little figure at my side did not speak. I bent over him. He had cheated the torture-chambers. They could not get him now. From his pocket a worn and thumb-marked bit of paper protruded. In the hope of learning his name I read it.

It was a message from a mother to her son. There was no post-mark. No address. Nothing to lead to his identity. Just "Jim, come home. Mother needs you. Your little sister and I pray for you every night. We are very lonely with you away. Come home, dear boy."

That was all. Just a good-by message—the last he was ever to receive from that little mother somewhere in the States. If she could see her boy now!

THE PRICE OF THE WANDERLUST

"AND what did he die for?" I asked myself. What would I have died for? Just the battle-lust, that is all. The something inside of us that makes us soldiers of fortune. The wanderlust!

I buried him, in the night, on the side of a hill where the soil was softer and a little grass grew. A nameless grave with not even a mark to show that a body rested there.

Perhaps the mother may read these lines and recognize in the little soldier of fortune her boy. At least she may console herself with the thought that his flesh was not food for coyotes; his bones not bleaching white

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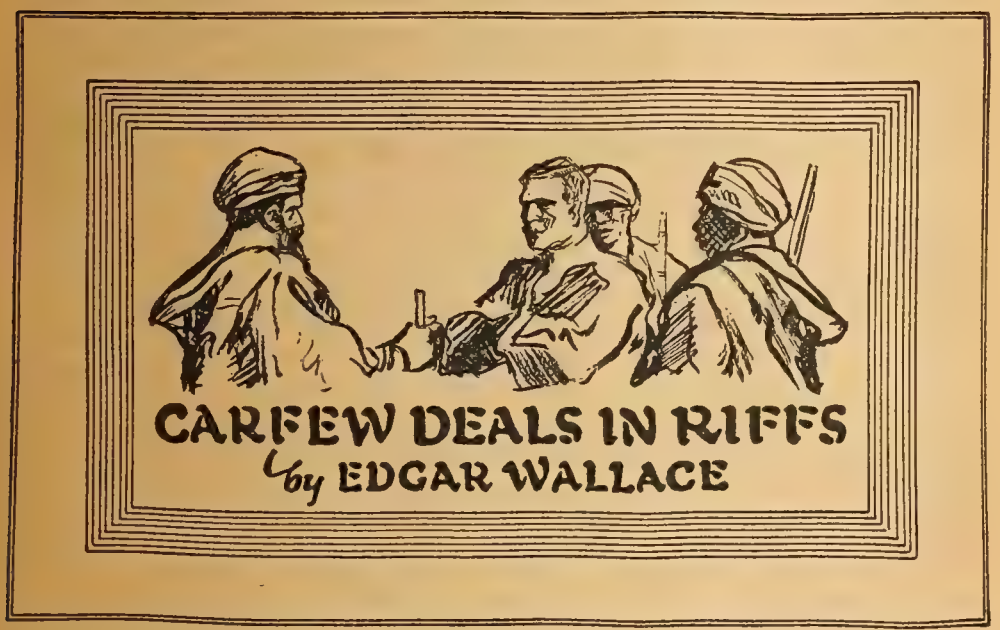
in the sun like two hundred others of his comrades who in five short months paid the penalty of the battle-lust in Mexico.

As for myself, I stole like a thief in the night across the border and surrendered to the United States authorities. With ninety-three of my fellows I was penned up in Fort Rosecrans at San Diego for five days, while the Government in Mexico we had sought to overthrow pleaded for our possession. Uncle Sam refused to give us up, but he kept our General, daring young Jack Mosby, veteran of five wars, beloved of his men, who is now at the Naval Disciplinary Barracks, Puget Sound, for taking French leave of the United States Navy when the Mexican war-cloud broke.

Of the ninety-three who survived that bloody day which cost us so many men, some are now fighting in the Balkans under different flags, and, if the powers of Europe clash over the division of the spoils, I feel that I must join them, even at the penalty of the cost!



THE BAD EGG stood at the end of the long wooden pier and watched the incoming boat. Behind him Tangier rose, a jumble of white buildings with one slim minaret. Before him, looming through the heat-mists that lay on the straits, the gray-green bulk of the Spanish hills. Somewhere round the shoulder of the African coast was Gibraltar.

The Cadiz mail was in, and it was from the *Peaglyo* that the shore boat was slowly pulling.

A struggling mass of guides and porters waited at the head of the gangway, but the Bad Egg stood aloof, his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his worn coat, his soiled panama at a rakish angle on his head and a limp cigarette hanging from his lips.

He was taller than the average man, broad of shoulder, slim of waist, and his clean-shaven face was tanned to reddish brown by long exposure to the African sun.

He saw the passengers land, speculated idly what States they came from—they were undoubtedly American—and followed at the tail of the straggling procession.

Climbing the evil-smelling hill street he found himself in the little square, elbowed and jostled by the crowd that fills the space before the Bristol Hotel day and night.

He nodded at a man sitting at a table

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before the hotel and would have passed on, but the other beckoned him.

"Have a drink?" was the invitation, and he sat down.

The Bad Egg was surveying the passing throng with that insatiable curiosity which was at once his charm and his undoing. He turned his head at the other's voice.

"Well," he repeated, with a smile, "I guess I'm through." The other was a short stout man with a reddish face and a hand rendered tremulous by overwork. Even as he spoke he was lifting a glass to his lips.

"Ha!" he sighed gratefully and wiped his mouth. "Better! See here, my transatlantic friend, what in the name of Heaven are you going to do now?"

"I'll quit."

The Bad Egg rolled a Spanish cigarette deftly, pulled the soiled brim of his hat farther over his eyes and smoked philosophically.

"An' what do you expect at Tangier?" the other sneered; "a diplomatic appointment? Or was it the command of the Pretender's army that brought you from—where was it?"

"Pearlingcopra," said the other easily. He was neither embarrassed nor abashed. "Those old islands," he waved his hands vaguely in the possible direction of the Western Pacific, "are played out."

"Go home," said the other, and the Bad Egg smiled.

"There are reasons why I must disregard your well-meaning and disinterested advice," he smiled. "At present I am a little Ishmael."

He sat tapping his boot thoughtfully with a wanghee.

"I came to Tangier," he went on, "because Tangier looks likely. It is under the nose of Europe, so Europe has not seen its possibilities! This morning I saw Mahommed El Torres, the Minister of War, and offered him my services as instructor. Nothin' doin'. Yesterday I saw the original Ali Ben Hoodlam, who runs the Pretender. Nothin' doin'. I have, at this moment, five Spanish dollars of doubtful quality, and forty centimos of indisputable genuineness. How to live?"

The fat man chuckled and ordered another drink.

"You might get a job in a store," he said, "but we've heard about you. The American fleet was here when you arrived and you were recognized. You're a Bad Egg!"

"How's that?"

"Bad Egg—rotten—no good," explained the fat man with brutal frankness.

Manton—such was the Bad Egg's name—laughed and rose.

"They say you shot a prisoner in the Philippines. Is that true?"

Manton looked down at his host with insolent amusement.

"I will not satisfy your vicious curiosity!" he said.

He strode up the narrow street to the great square—past the gloomy cafés where white-robed men sat cross-legged and sipped coffee noisily.

The square was crowded, for it was market-day. A dozen sorry-looking camels were kneeling in the very center of the throng. A holy man sat placidly before his hut, and the crowd about a professional story-teller blocked the way.

Manton, the Bad Egg, passed a man who stared at him; a well-arranged man of forty, piloting two ladies through the press. They passed so close that their sleeves brushed and the man's face went brick red.

"Wasn't that——"

George Manton, sometime lieutenant in the United States Army, overheard the hushed inquiry, and smiled again, because he had lived down the fierce tortures that come from an outraged sense of justice. He had endured every earthly hell that waits on man. He had seen the report of his trial in a yellow paper, and had read the heart-to-heart leader of the New York *Dynamite*, which had branded his name "a blot upon the fair record of a matchless service."

And all because he had shot Phillips, insurgent, murderer and worse. Moreover, shot him by order.

THERE is a broad terrace at the Hotel Cecil, overlooking the blue bay, and here all that is white in Tangier gathers to take tea in the afternoon.

Manton, slowly ascending the concrete steps that lead to the terrace, caught sight of one party at tea, and went a circuitous way to avoid it. Since he was the topic of conversation, perhaps this was wise.

"But Captain Sewell," insisted the girl who was speaking, "surely there is some excuse for him. Didn't he say he was ordered to fire?"

"He said *I* ordered him!" explained the man, flushing. "He said the order was

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given in the presence of my Arab servant Ali. The man supported me at the court-martial, and Manton was convicted. But I'd rather we talked about something else, Elsie."

The elder woman shot a quick reproving glance at the girl, but Elsie Brunner, with a little rebellious shrug, was not disposed to drop the subject.

"What happened to the servant?"

She was persistent, he thought, but he had reason to humor her.

"He disappeared soon after," said Sewell, carelessly. "He was a curious man—a native of this part of the world, I believe."

That seemed to close the discussion.

The best of Manton's friends had found it convenient to drop the subject in precisely the same abrupt manner. You came up against the dead wall of Sewell's unwavering and never-changing denial that he ordered the shooting; the no less emphatic assurance of the Arab servant, who, unfortunately for Manton, spoke English.

The Philippines were far away, and many tides had risen and ebbed since the day of Lieutenant Manton's disgrace. He had "dropped out." That much was inevitable. He went the way of friendless, penniless men who drop out in the neighborhood of the Philippines. He went East and was forgotten. Now and again such smoldering interest in him and his life as still glowed burst into a tiny flame and people asked questions. Somebody had seen him in India, in Burma, in Queensland. He had developed into a sort of nomadic ne'er-do-well. Folk shook their heads sadly if they were old and kind, sneered a little if they were young and uncharitable.

It was the oddest of chances that Manton and Sewell should come together for the first time in ten years; unfortunate that the girl should recognize in this shabby young-old man the gallant soldier she had seen marching away from the New England town, she a child in short frocks, shrilly patriotic, he the smartest of boy-officers in his brand-new kit.

She remembered it so well, and remembered him.

Her eyes followed the shabby figure as it made its way to the outskirts of the crowd.

There was no disguising the character of the man. The swing of his shoulders, the straight back, the head held high, the air of good-natured contempt for all things, were eloquently revealed in his carriage. He found a chair at the far end of the terrace. The Spanish waiter eyed him doubtfully, but took his order. For he was either English or American, two nations which, even in vagabondage, are violently disinclined to accept impertinence from the servile Latin.

He sat sipping his coffee and watched the animated throng. There was color enough, for the Pasha had come with his suite to take five-o'clock, and they were sitting in a circle in their gay robes, sipping mint tea in the finest of glasses.

He had reached the stage of philosophy where nothing much mattered. The sight of his old enemy neither annoyed nor saddened him. He wondered then, as he had wondered often, what could be the attitude of this man toward himself. While he was thinking this matter out, Fate, in the person of Felix Carfew, came upon the scene.

II

THE best way to make money is on the race-track, because in this manner you are taking the money from notoriously coarse and evil men who would be pretty sure to put it to bad use. Another good way, and this is especially recommended to those who are too tender-hearted to endure the wincing faces of book-makers, is on the stock exchange. Here you take the money and never know the man you are robbing.

Of course you may be taking the last cent from a lone widow's savings-account, but more likely you are skimming the fat of the road-hog who so nearly added your name to the gilt-edged, limp-leather Fatality-Register which he carries in the little stationery-rack under the speedometer.

There are other ways of making money, some better than others, and none of them really bad, except the method which involves the use of a plaster-of-Paris die and a piece of lead piping.

Carfew, who had tried with some success many ways, was taught a system so simple that he went round London in an agony of apprehension lest somebody else should make the same discovery and inform the police.

There are certain American railway stocks which you can buy, and, as sure as sure, they will rise a little. Then you sell out and rake in a hundred, two hundred or three hundred guineas, according to the

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amount of your investments. Similarly there are certain American steel stocks that you can sell, and just as inevitably they will sag, and all you have to do is to ring your broker on the 'phone and tell him to cover.

When Carfew learned the trick, he made money automatically. He would read, without understanding, the financial papers, and learn that his rails were up and his steels were down, then he would call "071 Central," and say in a most businesslike voice, "Sell those rails of mine, Parker," or "Cover those steels," and at the end of the week along would come a pink form full of strange figures and a check, let us say, for £47.

One day in the Autumn something happened in the United States of America. There was a law-case between a big steel corporation and a big railway corporation, and the steel corporation won.

Carfew read the account of the trial in *The Times*. It was all about rebates and surcharges, and Carfew approved entirely the very strong remarks of the judge of the Supreme Court who tried the case about the rapacity, unscrupulousness and general iniquity of the railway corporation.

"The decision of the Supreme Court," said *The Times* correspondent, "will have a far-reaching effect upon American railways."

"And quite right, too," said the virtuous Mr. Carfew. "It is really abominable that such things should be."

The next morning Carfew, as was his wont, rang up his broker.

"That you, Parker?" he asked. "Sell those rails of mine and cover——"

"I should like to," said a grim voice at the other end of the wire. "Haven't you read the market-report?"

Carfew frowned.

"I never read market-reports," he said. "What I wanted to say to you was this: Sell those rails of mine and cover the steels."

"Very good," said a voice acidly, and the telephone clicked.

The next day Carfew received a letter. It contained a pink form conventionally inscribed, and a letter requesting £1240 "difference."

Carfew was astounded. He was outraged. He called up his broker and asked him what on earth he meant, and in a few plainly expressed sentences the broker elucidated the situation.

It appeared that, as a result of the litigation which Carfew had so heartily approved, steel had gone up and rails had gone down, which was exactly the opposite way from what the young financier had anticipated. Carfew paid the check with some misgivings as to his own sanity.

With it he sent a little note requesting an interview, and was asked to call.

Messrs. Parker & Parker's was a cold-blooded firm, and carried on its prosaic business in Moorgate Street.

Ordering Parker to sell steels and to buy rails was a different matter from interviewing Mr. Augustus Parker with a request that he would show a clear and easy way for the early acquisition of wealth.

Fortunately, Carfew was under no misapprehension as to his own sterling qualities.

Mr. Parker was a man of fifty, suave and absent. He was smooth of face, and had a little black mustache and a fascinating trick of wrinkling up his nose when he disagreed with your point of view.

"Very unfortunate," he said gently, "very unfortunate, of course."

He looked out of the window and frowned.

"I am not crying about the money I have lost," said Carfew. "I hope I am too good a sportsman to worry about that sort of thing. Only, I want it back."

"Ah, yes!" murmured Mr. Parker, mildly surprised and almost interested. "At the same time, Mr. Carfew," he added, "you have nothing to grumble about."

"I am not grumbling at what I have," said Carfew with acerbity, "but at what I have lost." What I want you to do," he went on, growing confidential, "is to put me into something. I want to get a stock that is as low as it possibly can be, and must go higher."

"So do I," said Mr. Parker sympathetically.

"You know much more about these things than I," Carfew admitted graciously. "You're in the heart of it. Now what am I to do?"

Mr. Parker was still looking out of the window. He permitted his thoughts to stray back to Carfew, and half turned his head in the direction of his visitor.

"As I understand it, Mr. Carfew," he said, "you want a miracle."

He turned his head to the window, then came back quickly, swinging round in his chair till he faced the speculator.

"Have you heard of Riffs?" he asked.

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Carfew made a point of having heard of everything, but the business in hand was too serious for idle boastfulness.

"I haven't," he confessed.

Again Mr. Parker was silent, then he continued:

"Riffs railways are at five shillings," he said. "The road isn't built yet, but the company has the concession. It taps a vast agricultural district—the best in Morocco. As soon as that line is laid, those shares will be worth—anything."

"That's my stock," said Carfew with enthusiasm. "I'll buy——"

"Wait a minute." Mr. Parker raised a manicured hand. "There is a possibility that the line will never be constructed, and then the shares are worth—nothing. I will explain."

He took a gold pencil from his waistcoat-pocket, and drew a little map on his blotting-pad.

"HERE is Tangier, here is Fez, here is the Riff. That portion of the Riff country through which the rail must run is hill country, and at present it is held by a gentleman named El Mograb, who is by birth a Moor and by profession a brigand. The French are most anxious not to have trouble in that part of Morocco—it is too near Europe—so there is no question of forcing the rail through. They have tried moral suasion, and it was expensive. They sent a messenger with rich presents. It cost the government 250,000 pesetas to ransom him—that's about £10,000."

He looked out of the window.

"Well?" demanded Carfew.

"Well," said Mr. Parker, with a weary smile, "El Mograb is the big bear of the Riffs."

He looked at Carfew curiously.

"They tell me you are a very persuasive man," he said slowly. "You go out and persuade the Riffi people to let the railway go through and you'll make money."

"I see," said Carfew. "You'd pay my expenses?"

"If you succeeded," murmured Mr. Parker, "I might induce the board to vote you something very handsome."

"A box of cigars or something?" suggested Carfew rudely.

"Very handsome," repeated Mr. Parker, and shook his head at the vision these words conjured up.

"I'm a child in these matters," said Carfew with determination, "but I understand that before I went on such an errand your board would pay my expenses?"

"A little," said Mr. Parker hastily. "We are very poor. I hold a great deal of stock, and any heavy expenses would be detrimental to my interests."

"I am sorry you told me that," said Carfew. "It may keep me awake to-night. Now exactly where should I come in?"

Mr. Parker, by a supreme effort of will, withdrew his eyes from the contemplation of the street.

"If you buy shares at shillings, and sell them at pounds, you come in all right," he said.

Carfew nodded.

"I seem to have heard of options and things," he said. "Correct me if I am wrong, for I know very little about these things. For instance, you write me a little letter saying: 'My poor dear man: In view of the fact that you are going to almost certain death, I give you or your executors the right to purchase ten thousand shares——'"

"A thousand would be more reasonable," said Mr. Parker.

"'Eight thousand Riffi railways at four shillings——.'"

"They are standing at five bob," corrected Mr. Parker.

"Say 'four and sixpence,' Carfew conceded, "'at any time during the next six months.' How is that?"

"Preposterous!" said Mr. Parker frankly. "Suppose Riffs go up—eh? Suppose they rise independent of your efforts—eh? My dear good fellow——"

He shook his head.

"It is very unlikely that you'll do any good. The whole idea is fantastic. Now I'll tell you what I'll do—on behalf of the company. I'll give you the call on one thousand at six shillings for three months, and I'll risk £50 in the way of expense money."

"It's a bet!" said Carfew.

CARFEW had the faults of his genius. He took things for granted. He had confidence in his own judgment, and did not seek advice. He might have saved himself trouble if he had sought out somebody who was acquainted with Morocco and secured a few hints;

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but Carfew was superior to the advice of little men.

He had a plan of campaign in his mind. It took him less than five minutes to form it; once formed, it was immutable.

Three days later he left for Morocco by the shortest and most expensive route, and he carried with him three packing-cases which contained gramophones, a cheap kinematograph apparatus, beads of every variety and size and color, gaudy clothes, cheap little mirrors, Birmingham ware from pocket-knives to watches, and gaudy picture-books.

Tangier, all white and glistening, with one green tower to mark the mosque, welcomed him with a babble of sound. He was fought for, he and his baggage, by ragged porters, and after a breathless period of shrill recrimination, in which boatmen, porters, Spanish passengers and custom-house officials took part, he was landed.

He was taken in charge by a voluble tattered guide rejoicing in the name of Rabbit, who swore with facility in Arabic, Spanish and English, and in time Carfew found himself, limp but triumphant, on the broad terrace of the Hotel Cecil, drinking tea.

There was a table at which sat a solitary man, and to this Carfew went, because he neither desired solitude nor company, and one detached man struck him as being a happy compromise.

The other glanced at him lazily as he sat down and Carfew saw a look of quiet amusement in the other's eye, which rattled him.

"Is this chair engaged?" he asked sternly.

"Not unless you've engaged it," said the other.

"I suppose I can sit down!" challenged Carfew.

"You can please yourself," drawled his vis-à-vis.

They stared at one another for the space of ten seconds, then Carfew grinned, then they laughed together.

"You're English," smiled Manton, "you're so quarrelsome."

"You're American," said Carfew laughing, "you're so infernally independent."

He ordered tea and proceeded without any further introduction to talk about himself.

Manton was a good listener and did not interrupt.

"And exactly what are you doing here?" he asked when Carfew stopped to take in a fresh supply of breath.

"That," said Carfew mysteriously, "is rather a secret."

The other nodded.

"I am on a confidential mission," continued Carfew with relish, "and not a soul must know. It is a mission of—— Oh, I would not tell my own brother."

Three minutes later he was opening his heart to Manton with engaging frankness.

When he had finished, the Bad Egg nodded slowly.

"I should like to help you," he said. "I know this old country a little. But unfortunately any offer of assistance from me will be in the nature of a request for employment. I'm down and out."

Carfew rose and stretched out his hand across the table.

"Be up and in," he said. "Come along and help me through with this swindle and I'll give you all the money I don't want."

The other grasped the extended hand with a twinkle in his eye.

"You're a rash young man," he said, "and you're taking a risk, but you shall lose nothing."

CARFEW called upon the British Consul, carrying a letter of introduction, and was solemnly warned that, under no circumstances whatever, must he go anywhere near the Riff country.

"You'll have to get permission from the French authorities," said the immaculate Vice, "and you will have to provide yourself with an escort. It makes things a little easier for you that you're connected with the Riff Railway," he added, "because they have a sort of working arrangement with the Government. You see, if you're caught by El Mograb, nobody takes any responsibility for you."

"Trust me," with confidence. "I am not without experience of native tribes."

"You speak Arabic, of course?"

"Like an Arab," said Carfew.

He made no attempt to secure permission from anybody. Manton assisting, he hired mules and loaded them one night, and, passing through the Great Sok at daybreak, struck out for the Riffian Hills.

Carfew found himself leading his column and humming a song, the burden of which was that all that he wanted was love.

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"All that I want is you," sang Carfew unmusically, addressing the twitching ears of his mule.

They passed the uncompleted railroad. Tall grass grew between the iron sleepers and the rails were rusty. The débris of construction lay about—little wooden tool-huts, abandoned barrows, here and there a rusty pick or the sheeted bulk of a crane.

"Manton," said Carfew, "you see this railway?"

The quiet man riding at his side turned in his saddle.

"She doesn't look much good," he said.

"She's no good now," said Carfew, with a proud smile, "but, before many moons, the desert should bloom as a rose. This deserted plain will hum like a hive of bees."

They camped that night in the solitude of the plain. The next morning they resumed their journey. They passed little villages where the charcoal-burners lived. Once they saw in the distance a cloud of horsemen going in their direction. They kept even with them for a few hours. Then the strangers disappeared.

CARFEW camped at the foot of a hill. He was awakened before sunrise to find the camp occupied by a disreputable host of men who had bandoliers about their shoulders and carried businesslike Mauser rifles in their hands.

Manton, with a long cigar in the corner of his mouth, was interviewing the leader.

"El Mograb's men," he said briefly, "and they bring a pressing invitation."

"Bid them lead on," said Carfew magnificently.

They traversed a rough road across the foot-hills, and Carfew found the leader of the bandits by no means a bad fellow.

As they rode, the leader accepted with a smile the cigarette the young man offered.

"Tell him," said Carfew, "that I have come from the Great White King."

Manton smiled, and translated, and the man replied shortly.

"He says, 'which one?'" said Manton with a chuckle.

Carfew was taken aback. In all the adventure stories he had ever read, the invocation of the "Great White King" had invariably acted like magic. The illustrious Captain Cook, no less than Christopher Columbus and Carfew's other predecessors, had uttered such words, and the natives had thrown themselves at their feet with howls of reverence.

"The 'Great White King' dope doesn't work around here," explained Manton. "These people have had rather a plethora of the breed. Try him with Roosevelt!"

But Carfew relapsed into a dignified silence.

III

AT NOON, when the sun was hottest, they came to a camp pitched in a green place in the fold of the hills. They were taken to a tent, and, to their relief, the stores were put in with them.

"Later we shall see his Nibs," explained Manton. "At present he takes his siesta, and I guess we'd better be doing the same."

They were awakened from a doze in the evening, and informed that El Mograb would receive them.

Guarded by the man who had captured them, they approached the biggest of the tents. Here, under the shade of a striped tent-fly, drawn out till it formed a canvas veranda, El Mograb awaited them—a tall, grave man in a spotless white jellabia. Carfew observed that he was white. Save for the brown eyes and the little curl of beard on his chin, he might have been an anemic Frenchman.

Manton was fascinated, and scarcely removed his eyes from his face.

The presents were brought after a while, unpacked and spread before El Mograb, and the great brigand surveyed them without enthusiasm.

"Tell him——" began Carfew.

"I can save you the bother of the translation," said El Mograb quietly, and he spoke in perfect English. "You are Mr. Carfew, of the railway, are you not?"

"*Oui*," said Carfew, who felt that the occasion demanded a display of his own linguistic capacity.

"And exactly what are these things?" he asked.

"Presents," said Carfew a little feebly.

The Moor stooped and looked at the gramophone.

"This is one of the old pattern," he said. "Those with the sound boxes are ever so much more pleasant. Did you bring any new records?"

He squatted down in the Oriental fashion

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and turned over the disks. "There was a pretty waltz when I was in Paris a few years back — '*Reve d'Or*' — do you know it? Rather reminiscent of Offenbach at his lightest. I do not like Scotch comic songs," he said, "they are so like the songs of the barbarian hillmen south of Fez. Here is one I like." He extracted it and removed the paper envelope with deft fingers. "It is—what you call it?—an English grand overture."

He fitted the disk on the machine, turned the handle, and let the revolving top slip.

Manton watched him like a man in a dream.

El Mograb sat nodding his head to the tune, then he suddenly pressed the little brake.

"Too sharp," he said. "You haven't brought the right kind of needle."

He stood up.

"Let us go within." He clapped his hands.

The curtain that hid the interior of the tent rolled back and revealed a large, cool room, thickly carpeted and furnished with divans luxuriously cushioned.

"Will you rest?" invited El Mograb. "And have you acquired a taste for our coffee, or shall I order you a glass of mint tea?"

Carfew said "*Oui*" again.

El Mograb became suddenly aware of Manton's scrutiny and met his eyes.

"You seem to know me," he said, and showed his teeth in a friendly smile.

"I—hardly—know," said Manton slowly.

The Moor turned to Carfew.

"Will you tell me exactly what you came here for?" he asked.

Carfew had one great asset. He knew when to tell the truth, and he told it.

El Mograb listened attentively, and when Carfew had finished, he nodded.

"You put the matter in a new light to me," he said. "Next week I will summon the hill-people and we will talk over this matter."

That was all he said on the subject. He told them much about himself—of his father, who had been the old Sultan's vizier; of his own education in America—a suggestion made by an American minister; of his return to Fez, of antiques and wholesale executions. Then Abdul Aziz came to the throne—Abdul the Foolish. El Mograb had joined in an abortive revolt.

"It meant exile for me," he said, "but a pleasant exile."

He stopped as one communing with memory and again he smiled with a quick glance at Manton.

"It meant the endurance of hardships," he continued, "entering menial service—you will remember me, Lieutenant?"

MANTON started back.

"My ——!" he whispered, "Ali—you were Sewell's servant?"

El Mograb nodded.

"That was long ago," he said.

He walked to the door of the tent and looked out, shading his eyes as he gazed down toward the dusty plain, discernible through a rift in the hills.

"Now I am among my own people, and I have fought the Shereefian army many times. But I like Paris best," he added a little wistfully.

"I heard you were in Tangier," he went on. "One hears these things," he shrugged his shoulders apologetically, "but it was not until I heard that you were on your way here with Mr. Carfew, and that our friend Sewell had arrived, that I became really interested."

"Why did you lie, El Mograb?" asked Manton quietly. "Why did you——"

El Mograb turned, his hand raised in deprecation.

"My dear Lieutenant," he said, "be patient. Captain Sewell escorted two ladies to a picnic yesterday. They were friends of his, so my bureau informs me, who had come down from Paris to see the fleet."

From the folds of his jellabia he took a long narrow cigarette-case of gold. He opened and offered it to the two men, then he selected a cigarette for himself.

He lit a match on the sole of his slipper and walked again to the door of the tent.

"And here they are," he said.

Manton stepped quickly to his side.

COMING through the gap in the hill and surrounded by El Mograb's horsemen was a party of three—Sewell and the two ladies Manton had seen with him at Tangier.

They dismounted before the door of the tent.

The girl was pale and the elder companion wrathful and Sewell was easily the most scared of the three.

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It was Sewell who first saw the Moor.

His jaw dropped.

El Mograb walked in his stately fashion to the party.

"I trust I have not inconvenienced you," he said courteously. "I assure you I did not intend you any harm. I think I know a more profitable business than brigandage—now." He smiled at Carfew.

"You'll pay for this, my friend," said Sewell between his teeth. "I am an officer——"

"Oh, la la!" said the Moor sarcastically. "I know all about you—and as to paying——"

He called a servant to him and the man disappeared in the tent, to return with a thick wallet. El Mograb opened it and selected a number of French bank-notes.

In silence he handed them to Sewell and they watched him grow red and white.

"I return you this," said El Mograb, easily. "Blood-money lies on my conscience."

"What do you mean?" snarled the officer.

"It is the sum you paid me for swearing to a lie—a lie," he turned to Manton, "which rather ruined you, I am afraid."

"You are lying now Ali, you thief," spluttered Sewell.

El Mograb spread out his hands.

"I frequently lie," he said calmly. "I have lied for money and for the love of lying—now I speak the truth."

He nodded, and his men led the captives away.

No more was said of the railway. At daybreak Carfew and his men, with the other captives, were conducted to the plain below, escorted by El Mograb's ragamuffins. Before they left, El Mograb came to say farewell.

"Will you send a telegram for me from Tangier?" he asked, and handed Carfew a slip of paper. "It is to an old college friend."

Out of sight of the camp, Carfew read the paper. It was addressed, "Pollymog, London," and was in some sort of code.

He had opportunity for debating its significance with himself on the way to Tangier, for Manton was occupied with the ladies, and particularly a hero-worshiping girl, and Sewell rode apart, his head on his breast, a broken man.

Carfew did not wait for the Court of Inquiry which was held on the flag-ship. Neither, for the matter of that, did Sewell, despite the fact that the only evidence against him was the word of a brigand.

CARFEW arrived in London the following week, and Parker met him at the station.

"I got your wire," said the broker, "but I don't quite understand what you have done."

"I've seen El Mograb," said Carfew proudly. "I've persuaded him to allow the line to pass. I have argued with him. I have convinced him."

Parker eyed him absently.

"I don't know that you've done much convincing," he said. "The beggar had a pitched battle with the Shereefian army yesterday, and routed it."

Carfew was astonished.

"But the shares have gone up already," he said. "I saw them listed in Paris, and they've risen to eight shillings."

Mr. Parker scratched his head.

"I know that," he said irritably. "Unless you've been buying, I can't understand it. Somebody has been buying them by the thousands."

They drove to Parker's office, that gentleman deep in thought.

"If Mograb had come to terms with the Government, I could understand that people would jump in and bull the stock; but he is fighting and as obstinate as ever."

Carfew stopped dead.

"Do you know who 'Pollymog, London,' is?" he asked.

"'Pollymog, London'?" repeated Mr. Parker. "Yes, it's the telegraphic address of De Villiers. He's a broker who does a lot of buying for foreign investors."

Carfew remembered that El Mograb liked Paris best, and when, a week later, that famous brigand made peace with his Government, and it was announced that he intended leaving his native land and settling in France, Carfew understood.

El Mograb passing through Tangier on his way to Paris paid a visit of ceremony to the United States flag-ship and was received by a lean, tanned American Army officer—the guest of the Captain.

"I congratulate you, Lieutenant Manton," said the brigand. "The coming of Mr. Carfew was providential for both of us."

By this time Riffs stood at twenty-five shillings on a rising market, to Carfew's great joy—and El Mograb's.

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EIGHTEEN FLAGS

THE TRUE STORY OF AN ADVENTURER of ADVENTURERS

by CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

A SOLDIER who has for a half-century wielded a sword under the colors of almost a score of governments, and who has not come to the gray age of sixty-six unscarred, scarcely requires the labeling of epaulets to proclaim his profession. I did not need to have General Henry Ronald Douglas MacIver paged, when I went to look for him in a crowded hotel-lobby one morning. But perhaps it would be better to have recourse to quotation-marks for the first view of this gentleman whose life was for fifty years a canvas luridly and amazingly crowded with the high colors of adventure and romance.

Until that moment of actual meeting, I had known him only by other names. I had, for instance, felt the thrill of his dramatic personality as I followed his fortunes through the pages of "Captain Macklin," under the pseudonym of General Laguerre, who thought to build a stable unit out of Central American chaos. There I had read this description:

THE MAN YOU WANTED TO SALUTE

IN ANY surroundings I would have picked him out as a leader of men. . . . The signs of his calling were stamped on him as plainly as the sterling mark on silver. He was very tall and gaunt, with broad shoulders and a waist as small as a girl's. . . . At first glance he reminded me of Van Dyke's portrait of Charles I. He had the same high-bred features, the same wistful eyes. So, when he looked at me, my heels clicked together, my arm bent to my hat and fell again to my trouser seams, and I stood at attention. It was as instinctive as though I were back at the Academy, and he had confronted me in the uniform and yellow sash of a Major-General.

The temptation is great in writing about such a man to plunge into the maze of his adventures, and be carried away by the memory that he fought in eighteen wars; that he was seventeen times decorated; that he met adversaries in more than fifteen duels; that he treasured in his dented despatch-boxes autographed letters and photographs from kings and emperors and statesmen; that he had been a Count in Mexico, where there are no longer Counts; a knight in Spain by a patent from Don Carlos; a King on paper once in New Guinea; the model from which several novelists have drawn heroes—and all the testimony in evidence of the fashion in which his history outran the license of fiction.

But the picture I want to draw is one more intimate. I want to sketch a thumb-nail portrait of the man rather than to attempt a summary of the events in which he

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participated, from the Sepoy mutiny, where he had his baptism of blood, to his pathetic death five years ago among strangers in a Twenty-second Street boarding-house, in New York.

There would be plentiful stirring interest in a full biography, and much pathos in its finale, for the man who had been intimately received at many courts, deemed worthy of shadowing by Bismarck's spies, described by King Edward as that "vagabond gentleman, my friend MacIver," was at the end of his sixty-six years of life narrowly saved from burial in the Potter's Field.

I am sure that there can be no indiscretion in quoting from a letter which I received from Mr. Richard Harding Davis on the subject of the climax:

> The end was pathetic to a degree, and yet absolutely in keeping with the character of the soldier of fortune, the rolling stone, and of this "vagabond gentleman."

None the less, it was in one way such a death as MacIver would have asked. It came without warning or prior illness, though it came in a bed instead of on the field. Even at the last he was planning some large and adventurous enterprise, the nature of which he had kept secret from his most intimate friends. He had hinted to me that when the time came to unveil his matured scheme I should see unfolded a prospect which would fascinate me with the opportunity of playing a part in large affairs and in the making of history. What it was I shall now never know, but in a letter written two weeks before his death he had this to say:

> I desire to inform you that I have been inspired with a splendid idea which will be conveyed personally when I return to Louisville, and if you can see your way to join in the enterprise, I feel sure there will be rich rewards for both of us. . . .

And even later, within a few days of his response to the eternal "taps," he wrote again mysteriously of the "great inspiration" which should, after all the vicissitudes of his life, crown it amply and secure his place in history.

AN UNKNOWN MAN OF FAME

THAT a man should play so active a part in the pregnant happenings of his century, and die almost unknown and utterly unrewarded, might at first glance seem astounding, and yet analysis shows that it was inevitable. Though he had followed into battle, with capable and reckless courage, eighteen flags, he had never followed his own. Though he had repeatedly proven his great worth as a commander of regiments and brigades, it had been as a dreamer and knight errant who found himself in the wrong century and an anachronism. One of his unrealized ambitions was that he might, before he died, wear the uniform of his native land, and fight for the colors against which for four years he fought with the Confederacy. Scarcely ever had he been allied with a winning cause, but almost always he had followed forlorn hopes. Once more I fall back on a quotation. In his book entitled "Real Soldiers of Fortune" Richard Harding Davis says of General MacIver:

> He finds some mighty changes. Cuba, which he fought to free, is free; men of the South with whom for four years he fought shoulder to shoulder, are now wearing the blue; the Empire of Mexico for which he fought is a Republic; the Empire of France for which he fought is a republic; the Empire of Brazil for which he fought is a republic; the dynasty in Servia to which he owes his greatest honors, has been wiped out by murder. From none of those eighteen countries he has served has he a pension, berth or billet, and at sixty he finds himself at home in every land, but with a home in none.

The reason is not far to seek. The man who can command a company, a regiment or a brigade is not of necessity the man who can command an army corps or alter a frontier. The officer who can raise a command to a frenzy of heroism, inspiring it by his own intrepidity to impale its breasts upon bayonets and carry impregnable positions, is not necessarily the strategist who can to-morrow morning, by sticking pins in a paper map, prove himself a Napoleon.

This distinction between the man of action and the man of genuine greatness was demonstrated one evening in Louisville. MacIver had fought with the Confederacy for four years, and had made a record of signal gallantry. He had been on the staff of "Jeb" Stuart, "the Rupert of the South." He had carried despatches to England, and fought his way back from the feather-edge of death, time after time, but there was one man in the Confederate service whom he had never met in those days, and whom he had greatly admired. This man was General Basil W. Duke of Kentucky, second in command to John Morgan, who

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upon the death of that most famous of partisan raiders had succeeded to the leadership.

There is perhaps no greater living authority on cavalry tactics and general military operations than this quiet lawyer, who in his youth was the brilliant commander of an organization which struck crushing blows and vanished; which slept in its saddles, and appeared overnight far from the scene of yesterday's operations. In those two men one has the exact opportunity to contrast the soldier of fortune and the civilian out of whom a great crisis develops a brilliant leader.

It was natural that these two gentlemen should feel a keen desire to meet, and then at the last moment arose an amusing and almost ludicrous hitch.

General Duke lived in his own house, where he was prepared to entertain his friends. General MacIver was stopping at a boarding-house, where he did not feel that he could receive distinguished visitors on such a scale of hospitality as he deemed sufficient. But Duke had retired a Brigadier-General, and MacIver had won in the Balkans and southern America the rank of Major-General. He conceived that there would be a breach of etiquette should he make the advances of a first call.

General Duke, when this defect in the plans was explained to him, wrote a cordial note explaining that he was detained at his home by illness, and requesting that General MacIver, in view of this disability, waive superiority of rank and come to his house. After dinner there arose an argument so spirited that for a time the innocent bystanders stood back with bated breath while the two grizzled warriors charged and countercharged in contention.

General MacIver advanced the dictum that "Jeb" Stuart was the greatest military genius of the Confederacy. General Duke, who besides having been a distinguished soldier is also a deep student and notable historian, admitted Stuart's genius, but denied that he was of an equal caliber with Lee.

At the end General MacIver capitulated with the honors of war.

"General Duke, sir," he said, "I find myself unable to cope with your amazing command of historical data. I fought through the war between the States, but I have not since had leisure for review or retrospect. I have been fighting elsewhere ever since, and it may be, sir, that my perspective on the two men under discussion is not as calm or logical as your own. Therefore, I yield the point."

BORN AT SEA

HENRY RONALD DOUGLAS MACIVER was born at sea on Christmas Day, a league from the coast of Virginia. His father was Mr. Ronald MacIver of Ross-shire, a member of the Clan MacIver, and his mother was the daughter of a family which had held an estate in Virginia from the days of its Cavalier settlement.

At the age of ten he was sent to Europe, where his uncle, General Donald Grahame, was to supervise his education until he reached the age when he could return to the United States and enter West Point. However it was not destined that the boy was to take his fighting in the uniform of the United States. On the contrary, the only time he ever wore it was in 1860, when he overpowered a Federal picket and went through the lines, riding a Federal horse and wearing Federal livery, to offer his services to Colonel Scott and the other flag at Warrenton, Va.

At the age of sixteen the lad had left Edinburgh for India, and reached there at the height of the Sepoy mutiny. That was the beginning of fifty years of fighting. No man forgets his first engagement. I can see the old soldier now, his scarred face much tempered and softened, despite the fierce bristling of his stiff military mustache, and his broad shoulders thrown back, as he lived over in memory that initiation. It was at the battle of Jhansi, and he was cut off from his command. His one hope of escape lay in cutting his way back through the howling hell of the crazed fanatics. Sixteen is an age at which one should be battling with algebra and Latin declensions. MacIver told of one sowar whom he regretted the necessity of killing. With the boy's saber penetrating his chest, and the death-pallor spreading on his face, the native grasped the blade and spat in the youngster's face, then died, cursing the "infidel."

MacIver himself emerged from that first experience with one elbow bullet-shattered, and his head gashed to the skull by a tulwar stroke. He was left on the field

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overnight for dead, and when on the next day searching-parties discovered a flicker of life, he lay for a month in the hospital, with certain troubled memories of struggling in a circle of frenzied sowars.

After that the tempo of life quickened. He had of course no intention of following the fitful call of adventure. He had ambitions that were quite distinct from the renting of his blade to promiscuous overlords, but "Man is one and the fates are three." After the experience with the Honorable East India Company, and weeks in a Calcutta hospital, a sufferer from sunstroke, he was called back to Scotland to resume his interrupted studies, but no sooner had he made the return trip than Europe blazed with the stirring news of Garibaldi's march on Naples. Sicily was liberated! On one hand was the prospect of text-books and schoolroom discipline, and on the other that of following the Liberator and making history. MacIver could not see the advantage of studying history when he might be making it for others to study.

FIGHTING WITH GARIBALDI

WE NEXT see him at the breastworks during the siege of Capua. The British Legion occupied an exposed position with the advanced outposts. MacIver was a child with an exaggerated idea of advancement. He had read the "Three Musketeers," and D'Artagnan was his model. He made idiotic wagers, and exposed himself under galling fire on dares, because he was splendidly and recklessly young. Then, although he had taken service as a volunteer and a private, he won his lieutenant's bars, and his first decoration for gallantry: the Cross of Savoy, pinned on his red shirt by the hand of Garibaldi himself.

So daring and adventuresome a reputation did the young soldier make for himself in Italy that once, when he was captured by brigands and taken blindfolded to the mountain retreat where their chief had his headquarters, the name of the prisoner was sufficient to win for him a reception, not as a captive, but as a guest of honor.

After a night of entertainment and toasting, he was once more blindfolded and given safeguard back to his command.

Since it is obviously impossible to give, with even the rudiments of completeness, the record of this adventurer's military activities, it may be as well to pass them with a brief summary.

WITH STONEWALL JACKSON

AFTER the service with the Honorable British East India Company and in the unification of Italy with the Liberator, came four years under the Stars and Bars. He participated under "Stonewall" Jackson in the battles of Fort Royal, Cross Keys, Fort Republic, Gaines's Mill, Savage Station, Frazer Farm, Malvern Hill, Cedar Creek and Manassas. He was wounded variously, and at Harper's Ferry, while doing staff duty with one arm in a sling, his reins in his teeth and only one hand available, he received his most desperate hurt. A bullet shattered his jaw, and embedded itself at the back of his neck after narrowly missing the jugular.

There would be a very full book of adventurous reading in the record of those four years alone, for besides the life of field and camp with Jackson, Stuart and Kirby Smith, MacIver had variations. He carried despatches to and from the trans-Mississippi department, and later other despatches from Secretary of State Benjamin, to Mr. Mackay, the Confederacy's London representative. He ran gunboat blockades on river and coast. He passed back and forth through the enemy's lines. He was three times captured and twice escaped from prison.

When the war ended he terminated his activities at Vicksburg in a double duel with two Union officers, one of whom he killed. Then, mounting his waiting horse, he turned its head west for the long journey he had resolved upon to offer his sword to Maximilian in Mexico.

But it was destined that before he should reach his new commander there were to be wayside vicissitudes. The trip to Mexico in those days savored of hardship and peril. Eleven ex-Confederate officers started from Galveston to El Paso. After a night attack at the hands of three hundred Indians, they were reduced to three. Those three held off their pursuers in a long and desperate race for the Mexican border, which was all the way a running fight. Then, almost in sight of safety, they were captured and taken back for torture. Once again MacIver's captivity was converted into the position of honor. His stoic bearing under prelim-

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inary torture so impressed his captors that it was decided to spare the lives of the three and adopt them into brotherhood. Finally the opportunity for escape arrived, and the three survivors availed themselves of it, only to fall into the hands of Mexican highwaymen, whom they succeeded in killing. So unfailing was MacIver's star of luck at this time that on the body of one of the brigands, whose clothes they were taking as a means of disguise, they found two thousand dollars in gold.

General Mejia promptly appointed the young veteran of three wars to service upon his staff with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel. He had risen to a majority in the Confederate service.

A COUNT OF THE MEXICAN EMPIRE

MAXIMILIAN recognized his gallantry by conferring up on him the title of Count of the Mexican Empire, but before the royal hand could sign the patent of nobility the Emperor had gone out to take his stand between Generals Mejia and Miramon against the blank wall at Queretaro, and there was no longer a Mexican Empire. MacIver, still suffering from unhealed bayonet wounds, escaped after many desperate adventures and wretched hunger and hiding in the cactus. In his own words, "That was the open season on royalists in Mexico, and we were being hunted down like quail."

It was then that this remarkable glutton for adventure turned to the other Western Emperor, Dom Pedro of Brazil.

There his work was organization and army-training, and in Rio de Janeiro he escaped two attempts at assassination, fought two duels and quelled a mutiny.

He was in command of the Foreign Legion, an organization made up of flotsam and jetsam variously collected. Foreign legions are apt to be hard propositions to discipline. They must draw on dissatisfied adventurers. Oftentimes their ranks include refugees and criminals. Such was the legion which MacIver had the task of whipping into a soldierly organization, and before long he found that it was a commission requiring all his ability and grim power of dominating men.

Then came the terrible and devastating epidemic of cholera, which swept the Brazilian city and carried off thirty thousand victims. Men who could do so fled. Terror and demoralization settled upon the city. Death stalked in the pestilence-ridden streets, and nowhere was its terror greater than among the unacclimatized aliens of the Legion.

Disaffection paved the way to mutiny. MacIver saw the menace, and when it came to a climax rose from a bed of sickness and fever, singled out three ringleaders from the ranks of the mutineers and stood by to see them executed by a firing-squad in the principal plaza. To the unwilling executioners, hardly more loyal than the condemned, he gave his commands with drawn revolver. Then, as he rode back to his quarters, he fell from his horse, stricken with cholera. In the Foreign Legion fifty per cent. of the muster-roll was wiped out.

CRETE—THESSALY—CUBA—EGYPT—FRANCE

NEXT came an abortive effort in Crete to throw off the Ottoman yoke, and a campaign with General Corroneus of the Greek army to clean up the bands of brigands that were harrying the borders of Thessaly.

On the heels of these activities followed the famous expedition of the ill-fated *Lillian* to Cuba, and, although that failed, MacIver reached the island in time to fight vainly against Spain. Then in turn he took service under the Khedive of Egypt, but being disappointed in his hope of a war with Turkey, he resigned his billet and its accompanying luxuries at the Cairene Court, and tendered his sword to France, where with Chanzy and Faidherbe he participated in the battles of the Franco-Prussian War. He was an actor in the tremendous drama played on the red fields of Orleans, St. Quentin and Metz, and when Paris capitulated he passed through the days of the Commune in that city and watched the swift and brilliant recovery of the capital's phœnix-like rise out of ruin.

And now, having seen the crises of such world-shaking struggles; having seen Italy take her place among the nations of Europe unified; having seen a new nation rise and fight and fall south of the Mason and Dixon line; having seen the Austrian dream of empire wiped from the slate in Mexico, and the tremendous conflict between the battalions of the tricolor and the Prussian Eagle, Colonel MacIver—for that was his present rank—decided to withdraw from

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the career of strolling soldier and stand aside from conflict.

But he had gone too far. The Civil War had impoverished him, and there was no longer an estate to which he could withdraw in Virginia. He knew one trade only. He had come to hunger for the call of the bugle — the familiar scenes of camp and field and the excitement which the soldier must mix with the air he breathes.

For a while he strove to remain the mere civilian, but his hand twitched with an eager habit to the place where a sword should be hanging and, while he stood hesitant, Don Carlos and the Legitimists were preparing to launch a bolt against the throne of Spain.

MacIver was soon taking his pay from the Pretender, and wearing beside his Cross of Savoy and his decorations from the hands of an Emperor and a Khedive, the cross of Isabella the Catholic.

FIGHTING IN THE BALKANS

BUT that effort, too, is recorded on one of history's futile pages of failure. MacIver once again found himself fighting against the standard of the Crescent, following flags which he might be again following to-day were he alive: the Balkan standards of Herzegovina and Servia. It was at this time that the great Russian Tchernaieff on the field of battle took a decoration from his own breast and pinned it to the tunic of the Virginian, elevating him to the rank of Major-General and Commander of the Grand Order of Takavo.

Then for a while he was at Athens in the service of King George of Greece, playing military tutor to the army of Hellas, and that was practically his last European service.

Of late years he has organized and led armies in South and Central America. He has been called to Costa Rica, San Salvador and Guatemala, and even to the time of his death the revolutionary juntas that plan and conspire from offices in New York frequently approached him and sought his services.

One might suppose from this incomplete and sketchy compendium that the adventurer's time is fairly well accounted for, but besides these activities under the command of others, he on several occasions launched larger schemes of his own.

There was the great air-castle of the Knights of Arabia, for example, which fell still-born when the American Government seized its leaders as filibusters. The organization was oath-bound and pledged to "take over" an island, the name and geographical location of which they swore to keep secret until their dreams should come true.

From whom they were to "take it over" or by what means were part of the program included in the pledge of silence, but since New York was to be their port of embarking, and from the prospectus which declared that each "knight" was to receive "one hundred acres of land suitable for the raising of corn, tobacco and coffee, ninety days after the recognition of the Republic by the United States," it has usually been supposed that the intention was to seize Haiti and to supplant with white domination its negro government.

A larger dream and one perhaps as legitimate as the events which followed on the Jameson raid and gave Great Britain enlarged powers in South Africa, was General MacIver's plan for the New Guinea Exploration and Colonization Company, in 1883.

THE SCHEME THAT ROUSED BISMARCK

THIS scheme, which was balked by Lord Derby, and which aroused the Iron Chancellor to fevered activity, had enlisted the interest and capital of many enthusiasts. When the bubble collapsed, millions in money went with it. MacIver always held that Derby's attitude was inspired by a national timidity which cost Great Britain dearly, and that the administration finally rose in prohibition only when intimidated by the stern warnings of Bismarck. In that failure MacIver always thought that he had lost his opportunity to become the Cecil Rhodes of Australasia. Indeed he was often alluded to by the Australian press as "King Mac of New Guinea."

A great island territory, stretching over an area one and a half times the size of France, 275,000 square miles of rich and varied resources, was at this time untenanted, except by natives. England and Germany had their eyes fixed on the prize, and each sat watching warily, but neither cared to make an aggressive move. Mr. Servire, in the House of Commons, argued

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for British colonization. Premier McIlwraith of Queensland insisted that the cross of St. George should be raised. The press of Australia clamored for it.

There was need of some concrete action by some bold spirit upon which the empire could act. Then MacIver promoted and organized the New Guinea Exploration and Colonization Co., Limited. It was much the same sort of project as that of Jameson. MacIver was to explore, colonize and—raise the British flag.

Then Bismarck grew restively active. Whether Lord Derby was actuated by sane statesmanship or, as the Australian press charged, merely played into the hands of Germany, remains debatable. After millions had been sunk in the project and the soldier of fortune was ready to launch his expedition, the administration notified him that he would land in New Guinea only in defiance of British policy and under the muzzles of British guns.

General MacIver was in no sense the braggart. His point of view and his ideals were chivalrous, and he talked of his adventures only with his intimates. It was only from the newspaper clippings, scrapbooks, letters and photographs, which for the benefit of his closer friends he brought out of his despatch-boxes, that the record could be gleaned. It was only by questions which these records suggested that one drew from his own lips the personal reminiscence which amplified and gave flavor to the statements of the printed column.

His experience as a duelist was one point upon which he was particularly reticent. He was a firm believer in the code, although he declared that he had personally always sought to avoid such meetings in so far as it was possible. That he did not invariably succeed was evidenced by the fact that on more than fifteen occasions he met his adversary on the "field of honor."

Yet he had never been seriously wounded in one of these encounters. His body and face were seamed with scars made by bullets, bursting shells and saber-strokes, but most of them bore testimony to the chances of the battle-field.

One quarrel was of especial interest because its circumstances seemed to prove that the dueling-field had its semi-professional bullies as well as less dignified forums of combat.

THE DUELIST OF THE BOULEVARDS

THERE was in Paris at one time a gentleman whose days and nights were extremely vivacious and eventful, and whose skill with the rapier had won for him the name of an invincible duelist. It seems that a perverse and inexplicable form of vanity possessed him until it became practically a mania. He was reputed to have deliberately forced several quarrels for which there was no occasion, except a sense of his own superiority and skill. Several youthful members of prominent families, drawn hot-bloodedly into his trap of truculence, had lost their lives, and the victorious swordsman had permitted himself a sort of arrogance which made him much feared and hated.

MacIver had never met this man, although he too bore a Continental reputation as a master of fence, and when he arrived in Paris, fresh from his honors at the Court of Servia, he found himself in the pleasant position of being somewhat lionized.

His reputation was sufficient to fire the bully, whom we will miscall the Compte de Periet, with an aspiration to add MacIver to his list of victims. The two men met in a café in the Champs Elysées, where the talk was general, and drifted to the campaign from which MacIver had so recently returned.

At the hands of Milan and Natalie in Belgrade the general had received signal recognition, and for them he entertained deep and grateful sentiments of admiration.

The Frenchman seized the first opportunity to repeat a scandalous morsel of gossip touching the queen, and MacIver as promptly responded with the Anglo-Saxon retort of the clenched fist.

Arrangements were expeditiously made for a meeting at sunrise the next morning in a chestnut-grove not far from the St. Cloud road. So certain were those who heard the boulevard gossip in the assumption that the Compte de Periet would kill his man that the morning papers predicted MacIver's death and expressed sympathy. His adversary toured his favorite cafés announcing that "it gave him great contentment that to-morrow morning he would kill another Englishman."

"When we met," said General MacIver in reminiscence of the occasion, "he attempted to annoy me by making the most

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derogatory comments in a high-pitched voice to his attendants. I refused to give him the satisfaction of indicating that I had heard them, and satisfied myself with waiting until we should settle the score without recourse to repartee. I had met some good swordsmen, but never one who was his equal. I had but one hope. Though he was greatly my superior in the art of fence, I was taller, stronger and tougher, and if I could parry and defend until I had tired him out, I might with a chance thrust end it. If I allowed myself to become aggressive, he would despatch me in short order."

While the seconds measured blades and observed the final preliminaries, MacIver for the first time spoke to his adversary.

"I understand," he said, "that Monsieur le Compte has said that it gave him contentment that he should this morning kill another Englishman. I desire to correct Monsieur le Compte. I am a Scotch-Virginian; not an Englishman."

One can hardly follow the description of that duel without having seen the old soldier as he rehearsed it with many explanatory gestures and demonstrations of thrust and parry.

"Our blades were no sooner crossed," he said, "than I realized the wizardry of his sword-play. It was as though he held lightning-bolts set in his rapier-hilt. From the first he gave me openings which were sore temptations, but as I watched the satiric smile in his eyes and the presumptuous certainty of his lips, I remained defensive. Many seeming opportunities to thrust home I refused and, though he appeared to be toying with me, I had all I could do to fend off his blade. It darted everywhere at once. But the very swiftness of his fence began to tell upon his endurance, and when after five minutes of exhausting work, he found that he could not lure me to the attack, which would have been fatal to me, he began to grow more aggressive.

"One or two thrusts I succeeded in turning only after they had brought blood from scratch wounds. Then began a transformation, which for the gamut of human expression I have never seen equaled. He was beginning to tire. I could feel the earliest symptoms of it in his wrist as his steel engaged mine. Then I could mark it in his face, first only as a slight annoyance, then as serious apprehension. Next I could see that he was becoming hurried.

"He knew he must finish me quickly or not at all, and as soon as he realized that, his impatience made his attack an easier thing to handle. I lost my first conviction that I was to die, and began to feel sure that I should kill him. On his own face was written a similar conviction.

"The lips that had smiled insolently became tight-drawn, and into the eyes crept the glint of desperation. His temples and cheeks faded slowly and became pallid. Yet he fought on wonderfully, until at the end of twenty minutes he thrust desperately, and wounded me in the fleshy part of the left arm. That lunge brought my opportunity. I put my blade through his heart."

That afternoon at his hotel General MacIver received a number of persons whom he did not know, but who had suffered at the hands of the duelist and who came to thank him for the "deliverance." Among them were the father and mother of a young aristocrat who had been killed by De Periet only a week before.

"*Mon Dieu*, Monsieur," cried the father in tears, "had you only visited Paris ten days ago!"

In his older days the General was a great advocate of diplomacy. "It will carry you much farther, my boy," he would declare with a thoughtful and somewhat wistful expression. "It's a hard thing to be diplomatic and to swallow your anger, but it's worth what it costs."

He had played the game and grown old at it. He had tasted the fine exhilaration of nation-wide drama, and marched through life to the roll of drums and the fanfare of trumpets and the trooping of colors. He could close his eyes to see again fields where shifting lines of artillery were grappling across the breadth of valleys, or feel again the choke of smoke fogs under which forces were engaging, hot-breathed at the bayonet's point.

He could take out of his despatch-boxes yellowed messages from kings, and the Warwicks who made kings. Many of these missives contained the words "well done." He had a double handful of gilt and enameled baubles to show, and a half-dozen parchments granting him titles as worthless as Confederate money.

There was no child or grandchild to

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whom he could relate his adventures. No house in all the lands he knew so well was hallowed by the sweet intimacies of home.

Now, at the age of sixty-six, erect, keen-eyed and gray, he made one think of some falcon perched erect and aloof at the top of a dead tree, gazing off over a wintry landscape.

Before Congress he had a fruitless claim of some sort, in which he still nourished hope. In the British Parliament he had an equally barren claim upon a Scotch estate wrongly forfeited in some fashion by a long dead ancestor. In this, too, he insistently believed. But now, except for the trivial bickerings of Central America, where intrigue had in the past almost broken his heart, the world was at peace. There was no demand for a capable blade, which had for fifty years been active. He was a man out of a job—a man who had been too busy and too visionary to provide for such an exigency as old age.

And so he was, in those days I knew him, still hoping for great things; still "being inspired with a splendid idea;" still talking of "grand expectancies"—but alone in the world, and poor. Yet none of his friends realized that his carefully brushed frock-coat, a trifle old-fashioned in cut; his gray gaiters, his derby hat and military overcoat, covered the actual pinch of want. None of his intimates quite grasped the little economies with which he was, in the words of De Maupassant, compelled "sordidly to defend each miserable sou."

POOR AND AMONG STRANGERS——

IT WAS only his death that revealed that pathetic climax. He had made casual friends in the boarding-house where he had recently taken lodgings. He had talked with them as usual one May evening and, after complaining of trivial indisposition, had made his customarily courtly adieux, not knowing that this was the farewell before the long march.

The next morning he failed to appear. After a time anxiety was aroused, and a knock on his door brought no answer. An entrance was forced, and General MacIver was found lying on his bed with a book in his hand. He was dead. A heart-attack had carried him away as suddenly as one of the bullets that had spared him might have done. On the dressing-table were found the contents of his pockets: some letters; a quarter and two or three dimes; that was the total estate he left behind him. Even many of his decorations were never found. Whether in those last days he had been compelled to part with them for their small intrinsic worth, I do not know; but if that was the case, I know that to him it was a tragedy.

I do know that the undertaker who was called in sought vainly for any one close enough to stand responsible for his burial expenses, and that the body of the gallant gentleman whose sword had been so long and valiantly wielded, and whose 'scutcheon had never been sullied, lay for three days unclaimed and in danger of a nameless grave in the Potter's Field.

I do know that only through the intervention of friends who carried the matter before a Camp of Confederate Veterans was he finally accorded the honors of a military funeral. Many of his former masters and many of his comrades had gone before him. Other masters had forgotten him.

On his finger ring was the crest of his family — a boar's head, dagger-tongued, bearing the device "Numquam Obliviscor," "I never forget!"—yet he himself was forgotten.

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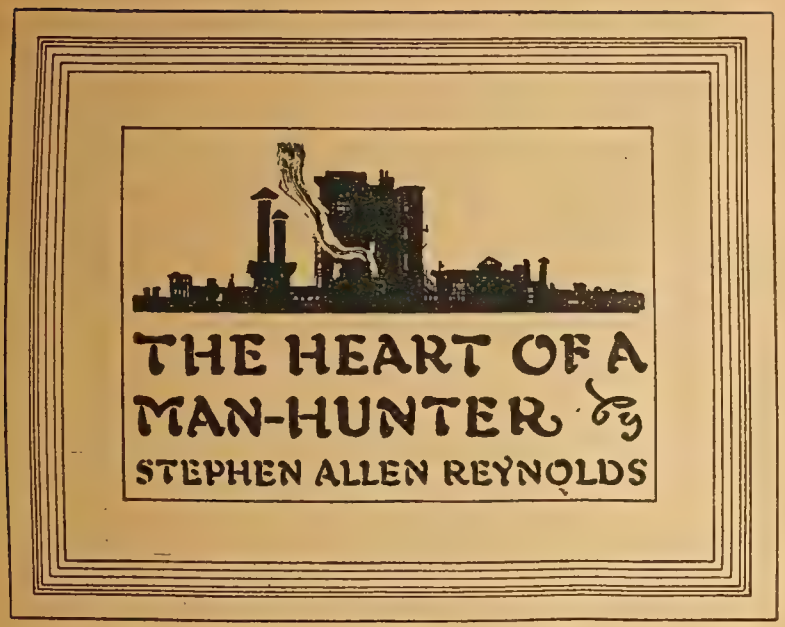

THE HEART OF A MAN-HUNTER

By STEPHEN ALLEN REYNOLDS

"IF YOU will take this case, Mr. Parr, I can assure you that the Administration will be very thankful. If you succeed in locating the counterfeit plates I can promise you the post of Chief of the new Bureau of Investigation which is now being organized in the Department of Justice."

The speaker was the gray-haired Secretary of the Treasury. We were seated in his inner reception-room and, besides that official, there were present the Chief of the Secret Service, Godfrey Parr of the International Bureau of Investigation, and I.

Parr thoughtfully fingered some counterfeit notes which had been handed to him for inspection, then laid them upon the table as he addressed the Secretary.

"I'm grateful to you, sir, for your flattering estimate of my abilities, and for your offer. With your best Secret Service men out of the country, I realize that you're sadly handicapped. That bank-note is a very dangerous imitation, and its makers ought to be run down before they flood the country. I'll take the case at my regular rates per diem, but as for the post in the Department of Justice under the Attorney-General—I tell you quite frankly that I don't care for it, nor would I consider *any* Government berth!"

The Secretary raised his eyebrows a trifle. The Chief of the Secret Service fidgeted in his chair, and gazed at Parr in astonishment. I smiled quietly, fancying that I knew what was coming. Nor was I disappointed.

"You see, sir, it's this way," Parr went on. "The position wouldn't pay more than a beggarly $3,500 a year. In time, I might have the salary run up to $5,000. That's a sum that just about covers my saddle-horse and opera-ticket expenditures for a year. It's impossible. On the other hand, however, my International Bureau will always be at your service. These counterfeits have been showing up in New York, you say? Very well. I'll spend an hour or two in Washington, and during the meantime I'd like to have you wire the operative in charge of the Eastern Division of your Secret Service, telling him that I may call upon him for data. We ought to get to the bottom of this matter within the space of three or four days."

"I don't see how you can predict results within three or four days," pronounced the Secret Service chief, with a doubtful wag of his head. "This case has been worrying me for weeks. I can hardly eat or sleep. With Doherty and McClure in Costa Rica, and my star operatives leaving the Service

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in order to start agencies of their own, it looks as if I'm up against it."

FIFTEEN minutes later found us at the entrance of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing. A note from the Secretary secured our instant admission to the mammoth Government plant, when Parr asked for Chief Portrait-Engraver Smiley.

Passing down a long workshop on the north side of the building, between rows of transfer-presses, we were conducted to a small room at the extreme corner of the engraving division, and introduced to the veteran portrait-engraver.

"Mr. Smiley," began Parr, as he handed one of the counterfeit notes to the engraver, "I'd like to have you examine the McKinley portrait on that bill, and then tell me what you think of it. Tell me what portrait-engravers are alive to-day—excepting yourself—capable of turning out such work."

The old engraver of the "Indian five" and the "buffalo ten" took the bank-note from the detective. Approaching his bench at the northern window he adjusted his magnifying glass and scrutinized the note for several minutes. Finally, he removed the glass from his eye, and looked up at us.

"To the best of my knowledge," he said "there are only three men alive at the present time who could have cut that portrait. There's an Austrian named Wesselhoeft, employed by the Imperial Bank-note Company of Vienna. Then there's old 'Dad' Powers, who, I suppose, is finishing up his fifteen-year sentence for that Internal Revenue stamp job. Then—there's myself. The work on the portrait is excellent. It's about as good as the original that I cut myself, except for the hair over the ear. It must have taken four months to cut. Aside from the McKinley portrait, the other work on the note is rather below the average, especially the Roman letters."

"Are there any steel-engravers employed in the Bureau of Engraving—or elsewhere—at the present time, or even within the last few years, who could *approximate* the workmanship on that portrait?"

"There are some pretty fair men with the American Bank Note Company in New York," the old engraver answered, "and we have one or two here who are treading pretty close on my heels. But speaking of men who have worked here in the past, it puts me in mind of a young chap named Roy Buckley. He was a sickly, frail sort of a fellow, and worked here until about two years ago. He put in his apprenticeship in Baltimore, and then got a job here. He was rather weak on lettering, numerals and script, but he was so good on portraits that I took an interest in him myself.

"He got to having coughing spells, and fell off in flesh, until he had to resign. He went off to the mountains somewhere down in Mexico. But he went away too late, for I heard that he died of consumption last Winter. If that boy had lived, and had kept on at his work, by this time he'd have been able to turn out a portrait fully as good as the one on that note. It's too bad he died so young. The world lost a fine steel-engraver when that boy died."

That Uncle Sam keeps a close watch on engravers and other employees at the big money factory was demonstrated shortly after our return to the Treasury Building, where Parr spent some time at one of the Secret Service card-index files. We had already learned that "Dad" Powers was still in prison. This narrowed the search.

Parr finally ran across a card which he studied closely for some time. He made an entry in his note-book, and handed the slip of pasteboard to me. Its typewritten contents read as follows:

No. 1874. ENGRAVERS, (U.S.)

BUCKLEY, ROY. Born at Baltimore, Md., 1883. Apprenticeship with the Sun Engraving Company of Baltimore. Entered Bureau of Eng. & P't'g. February 20, 1905. Good on portraits. Understands geometric lathe. Single. Slight Southern accent. Low voice. 5 ft. 7½. Slim. Weighs about 145. Eyes, blue (10). Hair, brown (5) inclined to curl. No beard. Light mustache, brown (2). Prominent teeth. Fair complexion. Mole left temple. Pleasant expression. Erect carriage. Brisk walk. Dresses plainly. Does not drink. Moderate smoker, (cigars). Parents both dead. No known living relatives or intimate friends. Resigned as Engraver, Class D, $2,000 per annum, on acc't. of health, March 10, 1908. Last city residence at 544 Maryland Avenue, S. W. Reported as having gone to Mexico.

(See reverse.)

Upon the reverse side of the card two short newspaper clippings were pasted. One of them, from the English edition of the *Mexican Herald*, was a death notice, stating that Roy Buckley had died of pulmonary tuberculosis in the Sierra Madres of Sonora. The date of the death was given,

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and the notice concluded with the line: "Washington and Baltimore papers please copy." The other clipping was from a Washington paper of a later date. The matter was identical with the first, omitting the concluding line.

"It looks to me as if this trail might take me to Mexico," Parr observed, as we boarded an evening train for New York. "I'll look into the New York proposition first, where the counterfeits have been showing up. Hope I don't have to go to Mexico, though, for I love that country as the taxi-chauffeurs love the bike-cops. I'll tackle Operative Glynn first thing in the morning."

We reached town shortly before midnight and, soon after reaching our club, separated for the night. I agreed to join Parr at nine o'clock the next morning at the Custom-House, where he expected to learn all that Operative Glynn of the Eastern Division of the Secret Service knew about the case.

II

I ENTERED Glynn's office at the time appointed, but found Godfrey Parr ahead of me.

"It's like this," Glynn grumbled, after Parr had introduced me as his friend and associate. "The Secret Service is short-handed as it is—ever since Congress got sore—but this Eastern Division always gets the worst end of it by having to furnish body-guards to the President and various other distinguished visitors who flit in and out of town.

"Washington has been pounding me to run down this McKinley plate, but up to the present I haven't been able to deliver the goods. It's one of the blindest cases I've ever come across during my detective experience.

"These phony notes haven't been showing up in any great quantity yet. They've been popping up here and there all over the city for the last six months. One man has been doing all the shoving, and he must be all over the shop, for one day he'll work off a small batch in the Bronx, the next day we're likely to hear from him in Brooklyn, and the day after that he's apt to show up in Jersey City or down-town Manhattan.

"None of the shopkeepers can give any kind of a description of the shover, for up until yesterday forenoon none of the notes have been detected before reaching a bank. Mr. Shover happened to butt into a wise guy who runs a furnishing-store on upper Broadway. This man had read about the new counterfeit with the McKinley portrait, so when a customer came in and handed him a McKinley bill in payment for a fourteen and one-half collar, he looked it over pretty carefully and spotted the bum Roman letters that we tell it by. The shopkeeper quietly sent out his clerk for the police.

"In the meanwhile the customer had asked for permission to change his collar. He took off his coat and laid aside his soiled collar. The clerk was back in double-quick time with a cop at his heel. But the fellow who was standing at a looking-glass tying his four-in-hand got a flash at the bluecoat and ducked out of the side entrance. He took it on the run across town. The cop was too heavy for footwork and, after chasing the shover for a few blocks, he gave it up as a bad job. Then they telephoned to me, and there are the clues."

Operative Glynn pointed to a table near by, and then continued:

"One coat, no marks; one handkerchief, new, label still on it; one package of Amalgamated Tobacconists' coupons; and a soiled, turn-down collar, size fourteen and one-half, with a 'C 74' laundry-mark on it."

Without comment, the man-hunter looked over the articles indicated, while Glynn continued:

"Of course, now that I have these clues, I've got a fresh hold on the case. The collar doesn't cut any figure, even if it has got a laundry-mark on it. There are more than fifteen thousand laundries in Greater New York—probably a thousand or more of them have a mark 'C 74.' The tobacco-coupons don't amount to anything, and it's a mystery to me what could have induced the shover of a high-class grade of 'queer' to cart them around with him. You have to save about a cartload of 'em to entitle you to a couple of teaspoons. I'll probably be able to do something with the coat, though; and the labeled handkerchief may lead me to some retail storekeeper who knows the man."

"Unless I'm very much mistaken, I'll have the man, the face and back plates, and the rest of the goods, within three days," Parr remarked in a quiet tone. Looking over the cigar-store coupons, he continued: "Suppose we run a race,

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Glynn. You take the coat and the handkerchief for your clues. You attach no importance to the coupons and the soiled collar—I'll take them for *my* clues."

"Surely you're not in earnest?" Glynn asked. "What can you do with those articles? There's nothing distinctive about them."

PARR'S answer was to pocket the collar and certificates. With a smile upon his face he then shook hands with the Secret Service operative-in-charge, and left the office without another word. I accompanied Parr to the headquarters of his International Bureau of Investigation, but was obliged to leave him there, as I had a luncheon engagement.

At about quarter to three, as I sat in the deserted billiard-room of the club, half hoping that some one might drop in for a string or two, I was summoned to the telephone. It was Parr. He suggested that, if I had nothing better to do, I might join him at a certain address. Shortly thereafter I approached a hive of brownstone-fronted flats in the West Forties, and found the detective on the lookout for me. He seemed to be somewhat disappointed.

"I traced our shover to this house," he said, with a nod over his shoulder. "I thought that I had the case about three-quarters finished; but I didn't. It seems that our man is married. They moved yesterday, neglecting, of course, to leave the new address with the janitor. I've already visited every furniture-mover within a radius of two miles, and telephoned some twenty others. Nothing doing. The janitor knows little or nothing about the people, and after a thorough search among the rubbish and odds and ends they left behind I only met one consolation. What do you make out of this?"

As he led the way toward Broadway, Parr showed me some torn cards. He had pieced one of them together so that the printed characters upon it were easily readable. The card, so put together, was about two inches in width and possibly twice as long. Thirteen characters were printed upon the slip of manilla, in a double row, thus:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	J	Q	K	

I noted that each figure and letter was checked several times in lead pencil, some of the marks being just above the characters, while others were just below them. What the card was I could not say. Finally, I ventured:

"It looks to me as if it might have something to do with playing cards. The 'J,' 'Q' and 'K' possibly stand for 'Jack,' 'Queen' and 'King' respectively."

"You're right, Clarke," agreed the man-hunter. "If you keep on, I'll make a detective out of you yet. And now, as there's nothing more to be done before night, I propose that we dine at the Claremont, after a trot around the park. Then I'll get to work again about ten."

AFTER a glorious hour in the park we changed clothes and dined in the cool of the evening. Ten o'clock found us in a taxi, crossing Times Square. Parr glanced at his watch, then gave the driver an address in the West Thirties. A few moments more and the driver pulled up before the darkened front of what appeared to be a private dwelling. Parr sprang out, paid the driver, then cautioned me to remain where I was until he obtained permission for me to enter the house.

He ascended the stoop, pressed a button, and a moment later the vestibule was flooded with light. A panel in the massive front door slid back and a black face appeared in the opening. A whispered conversation ensued, and Parr beckoned to me. The taxicab rattled away.

Preceded by the negro, we were admitted into the reception-room of the establishment, where a handsomely carved table and sideboard held cold fowl, sandwiches and other refreshments.

"Pretty quiet this week, Sam," observed Parr to the servant, as the latter ushered us to the foot of the main stairway.

"'Deed it is, Mist' Parr," agreed the darky. "Ah guess we has de only games open in town. De police am mighty peevish lately with dem axes and 'draulic jacks."

Through a steel door at the head of the stairs I followed the detective into a large room on the second floor, where I observed a group of men sitting around what was obviously a faro layout. At one side of the room I perceived a roulette-wheel and layout, the latter surrounded by some vacant, high-legged stools.

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There were no players at the wheel, so, after Parr had nodded to the lookout at the faro-game and glanced carelessly at the players around the oblong table, he led the way to the roulette-game and purchased a stack of chips.

His bets were trifling, however, and failed to interest the croupier. Lazily the latter spun the ivory ball around the polished rim of the wheel, while the electric fans hummed and an occasional muffled street sound filtered through the closed shutters into the room.

PARR had been playing for an hour, with his original pile of chips but slightly depleted, when a newcomer entered the room and took a seat at the faro-game. He was a young man of medium height. His clothing hung loosely from his bony, drooping shoulders. He was emaciated to a degree, with prominent teeth. But a pair of kindly eyes and a pleasant expression relieved his somewhat sinister and decidedly sickly appearance.

Parr gave the stranger a leisurely glance, then resumed his game. The newcomer drew a small roll of bank-notes from his pocket and exchanged it for several stacks of blue chips. His play was high from the start, and rather peculiar, inasmuch as he heeled and coppered his bets all over the layout at each turn of the cards. It appeared to me, from what little I knew about the game, that the player was looking for quick action.

From my position at the corner of the roulette layout I was but a few feet distant from the young man at the faro-table. Suddenly I caught a view of his left profile as he turned his head and leaned over to place a copper upon one of his bets. Just beneath his curling hair, high on his left temple, I saw a mole. Instantly my thoughts reverted to the descriptive card in the Secret Service files. Truly, the man-hunter was hot on the scent! My face must have told tales, for at that instant I received a cool, warning glance from Parr.

"Looking for blood to-night, Walter?" came from the faro-dealer as he paid a heavy bet to the plunger and pushed the stacks of blue chips within his reach.

"Two thousand or nothing!" was the reply, as the young man arranged his chips in symmetrical piles. He was winning heavily.

As the end of the deal approached, he addressed the dealer.

"I want to call the turn," he said. "What've you left in the box?"

"Two kings and an eight," replied the dealer, after a glance at the case-keeper across the layout from him. "It's a 'cat-hop,' two for one," he added. "How do you call?"

For an instant the young man consulted a card before him. I had not noticed the card before this juncture, but now I saw that it was a manilla slip similar to the ones Parr had found in the vacated flat.

"The king lost twice," the man with the mole observed, as if speaking to himself. Then he raised his voice and addressed the dealer:

"I've got a hunch that I can call this turn," he said. "Five hundred to a thousand—if it ain't too high. I call king-king." He placed two ivory markers upon the layout king.

"It goes," replied the dealer, after a reassuring glance from the lookout. "We never put a limit on calling the turn in this house."

Every eye in the room was turned upon the silver-plated box of cards. For an instant the white fingers of the dealer hovered over the rectangular opening, and then the first card was slipped out. A king was disclosed. The bet was half won. Again the white fingers moved, and another king came into view. The bet was won.

"I guess you've got the two thousand now," muttered the dealer as he turned the box on its side and reached toward his check rack.

"I don't want chips," was the reply. "Give me cash. I——"

But a fit of coughing interrupted his further utterance. For fully a minute he was unable to speak. Seemingly ashamed of his weakness, the plunger finally pocketed his handkerchief, but not before I had noticed that it was stained with blood.

GATHERING up his winnings, the lucky man handed a tip to a negro attendant, and then left the room. A few seconds later, Parr yawned, cashed in his few remaining chips, nodded to his acquaintance at the faro-table and led the way to the stairs.

As we left the gambling-house, Parr's keen eyes descried his man on the opposite side of the street, walking eastward.

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Cautiously following the young man, always keeping at least a block behind him, Parr initiated me into some of the mysteries of "sight-tailing," as he chose to call shadowing, until we finally saw our man disappear into the lobby of a five-storied apartment-house on lower Lexington Avenue.

Shortly afterward, from our position in the shadows of a tall structure diagonally across the avenue from the apartment-house, we saw a light appear in one of the top corner apartments. For at least fifteen minutes Parr surveyed the light. Then it was extinguished.

"That'll be about all to-night," said Parr, much to my surprise. "We can't close the case before to-morrow."

III

UPON the following morning, after breakfast and a little chat with Parr, I accompanied him to the Lexington Avenue house, to do "a little feeling around," as he expressed it. After looking over the names over the letter boxes in the lobby of the apartment-house, Parr and I mounted to the top floor, where he knocked upon a door.

A pleasant-featured woman of twenty-two or thereabouts answered the knock. She seemed to be a neat little person, and was evidently engaged in house-cleaning, as she held a broom in one hand and had on a gingham apron.

"This is Mrs. Cooper, I believe," Parr assumed, as he removed his hat and bowed.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Cooper," she asserted, looking first at Parr and then at me.

"This is Doctor Brown, and I am Doctor Hamilton," lied the detective. "We came——"

"It's about Walter!" The broom rattled to the floor.

"Don't be alarmed," the pseudo Doctor Hamilton entreated her. "It's about Walter—that's true—but nothing has happened to Mr. Cooper—yet."

There was a wealth of meaning in Parr's "yet." I felt mean and uncomfortable.

"We came to see you about your husband's health—just to have a little talk," Parr went on.

The brown eyes opened wide. The woman untied her apron and picked up her broom.

"Come in, gentlemen," she faltered, as she led the way to the living-room of the apartment.

"I know that Walter's health has been very poor," she continued, after we had found seats, "but I didn't know that he had consulted a physician lately. In fact, he has spoken quite recently of feeling much better."

"His lungs are affected," pronounced Parr. "You must try and persuade him to go to a dryer climate or a higher altitude. Furthermore, you must talk him over into *staying there.* He should have plenty of fresh air, fresh milk and fresh eggs. If you don't let him overwork or worry himself, he will get better. I may say that Doctor Brown agrees with me." Here Parr nodded toward me.

Great tears filled the brown eyes and coursed down the cheeks of the little housewife. I felt inclined to punch Parr's head for trespassing upon the woman's feelings while a penitentiary awaited her husband. What had all this fol-de-rol to do with the case? I asked myself.

"I'm very grateful to you for this visit," declared the engraver's wife, after she had succeeded in controlling her emotion. "If you had spoken to me yesterday I shouldn't have known how to manage it, as times have been hard. My husband has been working very hard at his trade lately, but in spite of long hours we have just barely been able to meet our expenses. It'll be all right now I'm sure. We've got the money to go away on now. Walter is an inventor, you understand, and last night when he came home he told me that he had succeeded in selling one of his patents for two thousand dollars. He gave me the money. I'll get him to go away. Surely we can manage somewhere in the mountains."

"How long have you been married?" Parr asked.

"It will be eight months now on the fifteenth," she answered. "Walter came up to San Antonio from the Mexican Sierras. He'd been down there for his health. We stopped at the same boarding-house. We were both orphans, and felt drawn to each other."

She paused, while a delicate color mounted to her temples.

"We were married," she resumed, "and then Walter complained of conditions in Texas. Then we came up here to see if he couldn't do something with his patents.

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He started a little shop, and ever since we arrived here he's worked early and late at his bench."

"What are his patents?" Parr asked.

"Really, I couldn't say." The brown eyes looked full into the gray ones of the man-hunter. "I think they have something to do with printing machinery. I never meddled with his business affairs. I suppose you've seen his shop?"

Parr nodded.

"Mr. Cooper smokes a great deal does he not?"

"Indeed he does." She smiled faintly, then continued: "I've been trying to get him give it up this long while. I fear that it's not good for him."

"I suppose he saves the coupons for you, anyway," laughed Parr.

"Why, how funny of Walter to speak to you of the coupons," she declared. "Only Tuesday morning I gave him a bunch of them to exchange for some spoons. He must have forgotten the errand, for I haven't seen my spoons yet."

Parr arose and reached for his hat. "There's nothing more we can say, I believe," he said. "Get him away, and take good care of him. Whatever you do or wherever you decide to go, be sure to keep away from New York. New York's climate is very trying for persons suffering from your husband's complaint."

"YES, I know where the 'plant' is located," Parr replied to my first question as we boarded a down-town car. "I'm going to stop at the office first. Before you were up this morning, at least an hour before we breakfasted, I trailed 'Cooper,' as he calls himself, to his Nassau Street shop. He's working the whole game single-handed. Probably engraved the plates while he was in Mexico. He knew that the Secret Service watches every engraver who ever worked at the Bureau of Engraving, *as long as he lives*, so I suppose he faked that death notice in the *Mexican Herald*. He's running a little printing-office by way of a 'throw-off,' and since his narrow shave the other day he'll probably stick close to his 'plant' for a few days.

"He's got a big contract on his hands working the game alone, and he's only half-hearted about it, anyway. He's got the gambling fever as well as the tuberculosis, and probably has been running off a few notes at a time, shoving them and then gambling the proceeds away—always in hopes of making a killing."

We reached the headquarters of the International Bureau, where Parr attended to a few routine matters connected with other cases. These matters disposed of, the detective remained for some time at his desk, gazing out of the window nearest him. An unlighted cigar was between his teeth. His brows were knit reflectively.

Finally he arose and selected a newspaper from a file. For several minutes he scanned its contents, then cut out two articles. He handed them to me, without comment.

One of the clippings bore an item originating from the Washington correspondent of the periodical, to the effect that the Costa Rican Congress had not as yet ratified the renewal of the extradition treaty between Costa Rica and the United States; that the amended treaty, not being retroactive, would not apply to refugees from either country who sought a haven before the formal ratification.

"It's about the last spot in the three Americas where he can die in peace," muttered Parr, as I finished perusing the clipping.

"Besides," he added, as he lit his cigar, "it's pretty nice up in the mountains around San José."

I could scarcely believe my ears. I turned to the second clipping. It proved to be simply an announcement by the United Fruit Company that its steamship *Tivives* would sail that day at 4:30 P. M. from Pier 16, East River, for Jamaica, Costa Rica, and Panama, taking mail and passengers.

"THERE'S no use of straining yourself, my boy; it'll only start you coughing!" cautioned Parr, as he pinned the arms of the anemic engraver to his sides with scarcely an effort. We had surprised him in a screened-off corner of his Nassau Street "workshop."

"I won't pretend to say what combination of circumstances drove you into crooked paths," the man-hunter continued, as he ran his hands rapidly over the form of his prisoner and pushed him into a chair. "Your name is Roy Buckley," he went on. "Never mind what mine is—you can call me 'Old Doctor Hamilton' if you like. I came down here after a face and back plate

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for a McKinley note; also for any completed or half-finished work that you may have on your hands. We'll talk afterward. But first, I want the plates and paper."

Trembling in every limb, Buckley drew the plates from a drawer beneath his plate-press. A few damp bank-notes, and some sheets of "backed" paper helped to make a sizable bundle, which was tied up under the watchful supervision of the detective. With a hopeless expression upon his face, Buckley tied the last knot, and then faced Parr.

"Take a chair," resumed Parr, not unkindly. "I want you to listen carefully to what I have to say. I'm going to turn over this package to certain parties. While I attend to this I want you to run up to your place on Lexington Avenue and have a little talk with your wife. You needn't tell her that you *haven't* been examined by a couple of doctors, unless you want to. Ask her, first, what the two doctors told her about New York's climate. And—by the way, here are a couple of newspaper clippings that you'd better read over on your way up-town."

Without another word, the man-hunter grasped the package and turned on his heel. I followed him out of the door, but a glance over my shoulder disclosed the erstwhile prisoner devouring the contents of the first clipping. His eyes were shining, and the hopeless expression had faded from his face.

"The entire case was ridiculously simple," observed Parr, some time later, as we headed for the Custom-House, the package under his arm. "Taken by itself, the laundry-mark upon the collar was of little value. Glynn was right in that respect. On the other hand, taken in conjunction with the cigar-store coupons, the collar was a most important clue, for it narrowed the search. I'll explain. While you were lunching your college friend I telephoned to the head office of the Amalgamated Tobacconists. Each one of their coupons and certificates has a serial number printed upon it. Quite naturally I had a good reason to suppose that they kept track of these numbers in supplying the coupons to their hundreds of different stores scattered all over the city. It also follows that a smoker will naturally patronize most frequently the nearest tobacconist to either his residence or place of business.

"After waiting for some little time to give them a chance to look up some of the numbers, I was informed that most of the certificates originated from one particular branch store. This clue led me to the residential district. Four laundries in the vicinity were visited before I found the one I was seeking. To obtain the address of their customer 'C 74' was a very simple matter. Furthermore, the proprietor gave a personal description of the man.

"Baffled at the empty flat, that torn card put me on the right track again. It is, as you now know, a card furnished to faro-players by gambling-houses of the first class. By means of one of those cards and a lead-pencil a player can keep track of the fifty-two cards as they are slipped out of the dealer's box. That card told me that, not only was my man a gambler, but that he had a penchant for faro, and patronized one of the first-class houses. As there are only one or two games open in town at the present time, I felt confident of running across my man in one of them.

"One glance at the poor fellow was enough to show me that he isn't very long for this world. One glance at his wife assured me that she was both ignorant and innocent of any wrong-doing. Were he to be arrested he wouldn't live long enough to be tried for his offense. It would mean a death-sentence to him if Glynn put the cuffs on him."

Parr shrugged his shoulders, and concluded: "Let his wife have him as long as he lives!"

OPERATIVE GLYNN was awaiting us.

"Here are the plates and some finished notes, Mr. Glynn," Parr said as he strode up to the Secret Service man. "That's why I 'phoned you to wait for me.' '

"Hell!" the other exclaimed in astonishment, "but when and where can we grab the makers and shovers?"

"Really, I couldn't say, Chief," Parr replied.

He glanced at me, an expression in his eyes that I can only describe as quizzical. Pointedly, he looked out of the window upon the East River water-front and drew out his watch.

I fancied I knew what he was hinting at. While Glynn busied himself with the

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contents of the package, I looked at my own watch. It lacked but ten minutes to five. I turned to the window and looked.

Over toward Pier 16 a white steamship was backing out of her slip. Black wreaths of smoke were pouring from her single funnel, and a brace of tugs were nosing her quarter in an effort to point her nose for the lower bay. Even as I looked the "Blue Peter" was whipped down from her foretruck and a white plume of steam shot up from alongside her funnel.

A few seconds later, the hoarse sound of the *Tivives's* siren floated up to us through the open window.

As I turned to Glynn, Parr was saying:

"I found the package at my headquarters when Clarke and I got back from lunch. There was no note in it. All I want to say is this: It must have leaked out that the International Bureau of Investigation was on the case. I suppose that somebody thought that this part of the country wasn't going to be healthy for them."

All of which, as a matter of course, was more or less true.

CHAPTER I

A CONVERSATION IN THE SERGEANTS' MESS AT SHORNCLIFFE

"THE fact is," said Sergeant Crawford to Sergeant Eyre, hanging up his crimson tunic on the peg behind him and sitting down, "the fact is, Eyre, my boy, that there's no fool like a —— fool!"

"Meaning what exactly?"

Sergeant Eyre allowed his six feet and seven inches of proportionately planned physique to hinge in two places. The particular sergeants' mess at Shorncliffe where the "Right and Tight" were quartered had been designed for ordinary men, and fitting a son of Anak such as Eyre between the table and the wall was a matter of mathematics and precision. He should have been a guardsman. But a desire to see real life had brought him into the Regular Infantry, and had caused him consequently to become proficient in the art of taking up less room than he was built to occupy.

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Sergeant Crawford screwed himself sideways and extracted a stick of plug tobacco from his trousers pocket. He began to whittle it before he answered:

"Why, you see, there are old fools and young fools and fools who might know better. They're bad, they are. But you and I are —— fools, Eyre!"

"Well?"

Eyre did not seem disposed to question the verdict.

"Here we are, Eyre, unmarried, both of us; with board and lodging and uniform all found; and with six-and-twenty shillings clear, more or less, coming to us each every Saturday. And there isn't a solitary silver half-crown between the two of us on a Wednesday afternoon, after twelve years' service! What do *you* think we are?"

"I think we're the victims of hard luck!" said Eyre, sitting bolt upright and trying to appear truthful. "If that brute Titus Oates had only won at Sandown Park, we'd have been two hundred to the good at least."

"Mn-yes! We've been in that boat before—and out of it, a score of times! We've won a time or two, Eyre, my boy, remember that! Remember Sir Visto's Derby? Twenty-five to one—ten pounds on him, each of us, at starting price. Five hundred good red gold sovereigns between us the following Monday morning! Remember what they felt like? Where are they now?"

"Don't talk about 'em!" advised Eyre gloomily. "Talking won't bring 'em back!"

"That's just exactly where you're wrong!" said Crawford, restowing the stick of tobacco where it belonged, and beginning to frazzle up the shavings between his palms. "That's what I fetched you in here for. I want to talk about it."

"Go ahead!" said Eyre, with a wry face. "If you think you can talk five hundred yellow-boys into my trousers pocket or yours—why, talk and be quick about it!"

BUT the shirt-sleeved Crawford sat and smoked and scratched his iron-gray temples for a full five minutes before commencing to unburden himself. He was the thinker of the pair—the older of them by about five years; nearly a foot shorter, but quite as muscular as Eyre, and as a general rule the greater optimist.

It was a matter of common knowledge in the Right and Tight that a business partnership existed between Eyre and Crawford. It was professional and unprofessional. Its ramifications extended all through the barracks, as well as to the world outside, and the partnership was kept alive for exactly twenty-four hours out of the four-and-twenty, as many a fatigue-evading private had discovered to his awful, inexpressible disgust.

They had been inseparable since the day when they enlisted—two raw, unshaven yokels, with a vast respect for "toffs and officers" and a mutual hunger for success. They had learned together, and shared-up what they learned. They had obtained each step of thoroughly deserved promotion within three weeks of one another and, since they had become sergeants, they had labored together unremittingly and with unqualified success, until B Company, to which they both belonged, was almost a paradise for officers.

Regarded as soldiers, they were special, extra-special, A No. 1 good men. They were sober, both of them; they were marksmen, and that alone would have forgiven them a hundred sins. In addition to that they were good cricketers. Crawford kept wicket, and Eyre bowled to orders on the Regimental team. And since they had both started to play full-back on the Regimental soccer-team, even the Gunners had failed to score a goal against them. The Right and Tight had held the cup for three years in succession.

They were whole-souled, enlightened experts, who served their God—who was the Regiment—and their high priest, who was the Colonel, without fear or faltering or favor; first, last and all the time.

But they had the weakness of their virtues—the faults that made human men of them, instead of demigods. To understand the chiefest of them, it is necessary first to get a line on Old King Cole.

The Honorable Kingston Cokely, who ran that regiment until it was the only thing that ever happened to the British Army according to its own account, and quite particularly good by general admission, was something else besides Colonel of the Right and Tight. He owned one of the best racing-stables in England. He was a man with an absolutely clean, unspotted record as an all-round sportsman.

The Regiment, particularly the sergeants, took their cue from him. They lived up to his point of view and his method and his

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theories on sport as far as nature and their shallow purses let them, and there was not a sergeant in the Regiment—or a corporal, for that matter—but could bet on credit. If a Right-and-Tighter with chevrons on his sleeve said he'd pay, he'd pay, and the bookies knew it. If he hadn't paid when he lost, the whole sergeants' mess would have collaborated to tear the skin off him.

But it was one thing for "Old King Cole," as his doting Regiment called him, to bet half his year's income on the result of a horse-race, and quite another thing for his sergeants to follow suit.

His income was in five figures—dividends on unearned increment collected for him by the Bank of England. Theirs were calculated in shillings on the pay-sheet. And he could not, in ordinary common decency, reprove their betting on his or any other horses, seeing that he did it himself without remorse or intention to desist. So there were complications. The Right and Tight were sometimes broke and sometimes full of money—but generally broke.

"There are no two bigger fools!" said Crawford, coming out of his reverie, and nudging Eyre affirmatively between the sixth and seventh ribs.

"Did you fetch me in here to tell me that?"

"That and some more!"

"Well, I got the first part. I could say it off by heart. Now let's have the tail end of it!"

"I was looking at the coast of France this morning."

"The —— you were! Sort of Napoleon Bonaparte upside down, sighing for fresh fields to conquer, I suppose? Thinking if it wasn't for the water in between you'd conquer France, or what?"

"I wouldn't give you twopence for the whole of France!" said Crawford with decision. "A country where they eat frogs from choice, and call a horse-race the 'Grand Prix' is absolutely no perishin' use to any one!"

"Well, what's the point?" asked Eyre impatiently.

"The Grand Prix is the point—several of 'em!"

"I've known you both drunk and sober," said Eyre wonderingly, "sick and well, on campaign and off it; but I haven't ever known you take half so long to cough up what you mean!"

"I'm coming to it," said Crawford. "Can't you wait?"

"Seems I've got to. But I've got to turn out at five to-morrow morning to attend to rookies. Can't you hurry just a little bit?"

"Well, d'you know what the Grand Prix is?"

"Do I know what a rifle is! A horse-race, run in Paris, yes, go on!"

"It's a week next Thursday."

"Well?"

"Guzzling Dick runs!"

"You don't mean it?" Eyre spoke slowly, as though not one fraction of the importance of the announcement had escaped him. "How d'you know? Why, man, not even the sporting-papers know it."

"They'll be the last to know. Old King Cole told me himself!"

"*What?* Old King Cole told you, a sergeant, that he's going to run Guzzling Dick in the Grand Prix? Why, he wouldn't tell any of the officers!"

"He didn't tell me in so many words."

"No. I'll bet he didn't! He'd as soon tell you what the Commander-in-Chief said to him in private!"

"All the same, he told me. And I tell you, my conscience is giving me the Monday-mornings! We ought to have a hundred pounds apiece at this very minute. Why, man alive, there's going to be a killing!"

"You haven't told me how you know, yet."

"Don't you believe it?"

"I believe anything you say, if you'll swear you're not joking."

"WELL, Old King Cole came down the lines this morning, feeling good. You could tell that by the way he walked—you know him when he's that way—trying to look stern and walk staid, and behaving like a boilerful o' live steam. 'Well,' says I to myself, 'Crawford, my boy, now's your chance.' So I watched points, and waited.

"By and by, after he'd inspected everything, he said to me, 'Sergeant Crawford, I'm very satisfied with you,' he said. 'Your duty's always very satisfactorily done. I've never any occasion to find fault with you!'

"I saluted him, of course, and tried to look like a chicken that's just swallowed a fat worm, and he put his head a little to one side and gave me a bit of advice. 'Make up your mind to keep on behaving

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the same way!' he said. 'There's a deal o' satisfaction in it.'

"Well, if that wasn't my chance, what was? I asked him straight out, there and then. I said 'What's troubling me, sir, is whether you've made up your mind or not! There'd be money in that!'

"He looked uncommon hard at me for maybe ten seconds before he answered. Then 'What d'ye mean?' he asked.

"I said, 'I was wondering, sir, whether Guzzling Dick would run in the Grand Prix or not.' He stared at me again, for maybe half a minute. Then he answered, '—— it, is this Regiment a committee, that wants to manage my stables for me?'

"I said, 'No, sir,' just like that, I said it, and I didn't say another word—I just stood still looking at him.

" 'I'm glad to know it,' he answered, 'because if it were, I'd be at some pains to fool the committee! Of course,' he said, 'if I'd made up my mind to run the horse, I wouldn't tell anybody, for fear the touts would get to know it, and spoil the betting-market.'

"I said, 'Yes sir!' he knowing and I knowing that there isn't a living soul in this mess that would tell a single word to any one.

" 'But,' he said, 'I like to give people a run for their money. I don't approve of men betting when they can't afford it, but Lord knows I can't stop 'em. And I wouldn't let them throw away their money on a horse that I knew for a certainty wasn't going to run. Good morning, sergeant.'

"And he turned and strutted off with a grin under his mustache that would have made the devil ashamed to rob him."

"Well," said Eyre, "he wouldn't have said that if there'd been the slightest chance of his scratching the horse. Didn't he warn you not to talk?"

"He knew there'd be no need. The thing is now, we've got to get hold of some money, and a lot of it, too, if we can. And we've got to get it on the quiet, without anybody in the Regiment, or out of it, being any the wiser. And then we've got to get a week's leave each."

"Why the leave?"

"We've got to go to Paris, my son, and see him win!"

"But why? Going over to Paris'll cost like sin, and he'll win without our looking at him! We can put the money on at s. p., provided we can get it."

"You know what Old King Cole's like, don't you? He's such a good sportsman that he can't believe that any one would play a dirty trick on him. Well. And you know Harry Singer? You know what crowd he represents? He's in with the biggest bunch of stiffs in England. They'll stop at nothing, that bunch won't, and Harry Singer's been hanging about, backwards and forwards between here and Rottingdean, for the past three weeks."

Rottingdean was where Colonel Cokely's racing-stable nestled in a hollow between the Sussex Downs. Eyre nodded sagely.

"I've noticed Singer talking to the men a lot lately," he answered. "If any news was to leak out, he'd know it quick."

"You bet he would! And there's any amount of big money been betted by his bunch on Tarantula to win—Tarantula's price is down to seven to one this morning according to the papers. It was tens. If Guzzling Dick's going to run, they're going to fix him so's he can't win—or they're going to try to!"

"Where do we come in, then?"

"We cross to Paris, and watch out that Old King Cole and Guzzling Dick get a square deal."

Eyre grinned. "Coley'd be keen as blazes, wouldn't he, to see us hanging about the course in uniform! Or out of it! Are you going to put in for foreign leave?"

"No, I'm not. We'll put in for leave in the usual way, and change into civilian clothes outside o' barracks, and take our chance."

"And get arrested as deserters!" suggested Eyre gloomily.

"Don't you believe it!" answered Crawford. "Why would we desert? If Old King Cole sees us, he'll shut his eye. There's nothing against either of us, and he likes us, and he wouldn't get us broke if he could help it. And nobody outside the Regiment'll know that we haven't got leave to go abroad!"

"Well, how about the money?" asked Eyre. "Where's that coming from?"

"Harry Singer's got money—loads of it!" said Crawford.

"What! That tout?"

"Yes! That tout! The crowd he's touting for are keeping him well supplied. That's what makes me so dead sure that

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there's something in the wind. He's been buying liquor for the men whenever any one was thirsty, for the past three weeks!"

"Gad! The brewery must have worked overtime!" said Eyre. "Well, how do we get the money out of him?"

"I'll tell you," said Crawford. "Put your head down nearer me. I don't want to be overheard."

CHAPTER II

COLONEL COKELY VISITS NEWMARKET HEATH, WITH UNEXPECTED RESULTS

COMMANDING a real regiment in time of peace does not occupy a man's every waking moment by any means. He has leisure, and plenty of it. It is what he is, more than what he does, that constitutes him a suitable commander. There are other men, who are now where he once was, whose business it is to teach the Regiment.

It is the commander's duty to lead it when the time comes, and to see to it that his ideas on discipline and training are properly enforced by those under him. It does the company officers good to let them manage their own men as far as possible, and the wise colonel does not interfere too much. He lays down the law, and watches its enforcement, but he has all the time he needs for his own amusement.

So Colonel the Honorable Kingston Cokely, whose one idea of amusement was association with horses and the turf, was by no means a stranger on Newmarket Heath. He might have been seen as often as twice a week riding his red thoroughbred gelding in the early morning to watch the gallops. His own horses were trained at Rottingdean, but at Newmarket he could get a necessary line on the form of other people's horses. He fancied, and he was not so far wrong in his calculation either, that he was as good a judge of what a horse could do as any man in England, and he much preferred the evidence of his own eyes to the say-so even of his own trainer.

By dint of trusting to his own judgment, and taking almost no one into his confidence, he had contrived to become one of the three most successful race-horse owners in England. And if that does not convey a sufficient appreciation of his shrewdness, nothing will.

But there was another little peculiarity of his, in which he was wont to display just as much good judgment as in his selection of horses, though there were people who claimed that his other hobby was not quite so legitimate. Like many other born and confirmed bachelors, he was a born and confirmed flirt.

He was ugly enough in all conscience to have scared five women out of six. But his ugliness was of the heroic type that betrays strength both of character and muscle, so that the sixth woman—and she was invariably the most discerning, as well as the nicest, as a rule—would look twice at his weather-scarred face and stay to talk with him.

And now let there be no misunderstandings. There was not a man who knew Colonel Cokely intimately, or by hearsay even, who would not have left a sister in his charge. The sister would have been a lucky woman, even if her heart did suffer for a time. She would have had little presents bought for her, and little favors shown her. She would have felt her heart fluttering against her ribs, and she would very possibly have been kissed a time or two.

But she would have realized before she had been in his company ten minutes that she had met her master in a man who regarded flirting as a fine art, to be treated as such, and to be kept within certain very definite limits.

SO, IT was not at all astonishing that the morning after Crawford's talk with his fellow-ergeant Eyres at Shorncliffe should find Colonel Cokely riding on Newmarket Heath before breakfast, and no more astonishing that he should draw rein and raise his hat when one-and-twenty in a pale-blue dress and a picture-hat leaned on a cottage gate and smiled at him. Nor was he at a loss for words.

"I beg your pardon," he said, edging his horse toward the gate, and leaning forward a little to get a view of her face in a direct line with the early sun, "but could you tell me where a horse called Tarantula gets his gallops? I came down to have a look at him."

He had just come from watching Tarantula do twelve furlongs at top speed, but he did not expect her to know that. He did expect her to know about the horse, though, for there was no mistaking her type among

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a thousand. She was of the English middle-class sporting type, pert as a sparrow, brimming full of fun, without a sniff of patchouli or a touch of rouge in her whole make-up—and as pretty as the early blossom on the apple-trees behind her.

She looked straight back at him from under the rim of her blossom-covered hat, and laughed at him with a pair of violet eyes. But her lips were demure and prim.

"Over behind here," she said, pointing past the cottage behind her. "I took the short cut back across the Heath, so I got here first. I spent more time watching you than Tarantula. That's a lovely horse of yours."

The Colonel laughed aloud. "So I'm found out, am I. Well then, I'll tell the truth. I wanted an excuse to talk to you!"

"I don't think I mind, Colonel Cokely! At least, not as long as you're that side of the gate!"

"So you even know my name, do you! You've got me altogether at a disadvantage, haven't you!"

She laughed aloud now, with the keen delight that any of Eve's daughters takes in fencing with a son of Adam—across a gate!

"I've seen you at Shorncliffe twice, and more than a score of times at Newmarket. Why, Colonel Cokely, everybody knows you! Why shouldn't I?"

"Why not? But may I know who you are? That's the more important point. I won't say that I'm dying to know, because I'm afraid I look too well for that, but—ah—well—who are you, anyway? Dash it, you're charming enough to be an angel!"

"Not yet, thanks. I'm enjoying this mortal life to the top of my bent at present! My name's Jolliffe."

"Not Francis Jolliffe's daughter?"

She nodded, watching his face keenly, and the Colonel stared a little harder than was quite polite. Francis Jolliffe was a man who enjoyed, or appeared to enjoy, a certain reputation.

"The Francis Jolliffe who trains Tarantula?"

"Among others."

The Colonel seemed rather at a loss for words. "I'm, ah—awfully glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Jolliffe," he said. But his eye was wandering now, and he noticed, from behind a curtain that obscured one of the cottage windows, an angular, keen-eyed face that was missing nothing of what transpired.

"Ah—how's Tarantula?" he asked.

"You've seen him. Don't you think he's looking fit?"

"Yes. I thought so. Well, you'll excuse me, won't you, Miss Jolliffe, but breakfast's waiting for me. I must be going. Hope to meet you again some day—on the Heath," he added as an afterthought. Then he raised his hat, with the courtly, old-world motion that was characteristic of him and made him appear ten years younger than he really was, and rode away.

"Strange that a man like Jolliffe should have a daughter like that!" he muttered to himself. "Lord, what a pity!"

JANE JOLLIFFE turned her back toward the gate, and murmured softly to herself: "I wonder whether Colonel Cokely generally lets his breakfast stand between him and a conversation. Oh, mother of me! Dear dead mother of me. Grooms and stable-boys for friends, and even the best of them look sideways at me! Every gentleman I've ever met liked to talk to me until he found out who my father is—and then!—— Oh, yes, I'm enjoying this mortal life, I am! I wonder, will any honest man ever make honest love to me?"

She wore a brave face, and was smiling, though, when she reached the cottage door. It was opened for her by the owner of the face that had watched from behind the curtain. He was a lean man of scarcely middle height, and he contrived to express cupidity and cunning in every line of his gray-clad figure as well as in his thin lips and sharp-edged, beak-like nose.

"D'you know who that was, Jane?" he asked her, swinging the door back, and scarcely giving her time to cross the threshold. It seemed almost impossible that they could be father and daughter. Even their voices were as different as the purring of a kitten is from the barking of a terrier.

"Of course I know. Colonel Cokely."

"Come on in. I want to talk to you!"

He slammed the door hastily, and almost ran her into the breakfast-room. She took her place at the end of the table, but he paced up and down the room, stopping every now and then to dig one of his spurs into his leather legging impatiently.

"Now listen, Jane!" he said, after a

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minute's twisting at his fiercely waxed mustache. "I don't want any argument. That man owns Guzzling Dick, and Guzzling Dick's the only horse that has a chance to beat Tarantula in the Grand Prix. D'you understand?"

"Oh, yes, I understand! What's coming?"

"You're going. That's what's going to happen! You're going to Shorncliffe, to stay with your aunt again. Colonel Cokely commands the Right and Tight, and he's at Shorncliffe most of the time. He only comes up here for half a day or so, once or twice a week. He'll be there to-morrow, sure."

"Well?" she asked, wearily. "Sit down and eat some breakfast, father, do—it'll get cold."

"Hang breakfast! Let it wait! Nobody knows yet whether Guzzling Dick will run or not. I want to know. D'you see?"

"Well? Why not ask Colonel Cokely?"

He stared at her almost savagely for half a minute, and began to pace the room again. "Cokely wouldn't tell me if his salvation depended on it. He's the closest-mouthed man who ever owned a horse! But he's got the name of liking a pretty girl better than a horse, even. A pretty girl could make him talk."

She did not answer him, although he waited for almost a minute, watching her sideways through half-closed eyes.

"You're a pretty girl!"

"What of it?" she demanded hotly. "Haven't you cheapened me enough without going any further? Can't you train horses without using me as a catspaw for your schemes? I told you once before that I wouldn't do anything dishonest to——"

She laid her elbows on the table, and buried her face between her hands.

"Well, of all the—— Who asked you to do anything dishonest?" he demanded. "All I ask you to do is to go to Shorncliffe and to get certain information out of Colonel Cokely. You don't seem to mind flirting with him across the garden gate, for your own amusement. But it appears you draw the line at doing the same thing at Shorncliffe to help your father out of a difficulty! Nobody wants you to do anything dishonest. There's nothing dishonest in it."

"I wish I believed you!"

"Why shouldn't you believe me? Tell me that! I suppose you don't believe I'm in a difficulty?"

"Oh, yes. I believe that. You're always in difficulties. People always are who don't run straight."

"This is none of my making. Listen. Mr. Pike, who owns Tarantula——"

"Mr. Pike is an honest man, I suppose?"

"That's none of your business or mine. The point is that he owns Tarantula, and that I'm training the horse for him. As his trainer, I'm in duty bound to use every possible effort to obtain all information that can possibly be of use to him. If Tarantula wins the Grand Prix, Mr. Pike and I will both of us make a killing, and the horse can and will win unless Guzzling Dick runs. In that case, the result is doubtful. If Guzzling Dick isn't going to run, we'll know how to bet. We'll bet heavily."

"And if he is going to run? What then?"

"That's my business! I run this stable without interference from anybody."

"I knew there was something crooked at the bottom of this."

"Nonsense! You drive me nearly mad! If Guzzling Dick is going to run, we might scratch Tarantula and enter him in some other race."

"Might! You told me only two days ago that you'd already betted every cent you could raise on him to win the Grand Prix. You told me that, you remember, when I asked you for extra housekeeping money!"

He drove his spur into his legging savagely, and paced twice up and down the room before he answered her. Then, however, he adopted a different line of argument.

"LOOK here, Jane. Be reasonable. It amounts to this: Tarantula has simply got to win! I stand to win thousands if he does, and so does Mr. Pike. And if he loses, we'll both be broke—absolutely stone-cold-broke, you understand? Pebbly-beached! Sold up! Pike owes me a big bill for training exes among other things, and he can't settle until after the race. Now there's nothing dishonorable in what I want you to do. I ask you to go to Shorncliffe and get certain information for me, which may mean thousands. It may mean the difference between bankruptcy and the other thing! Cokely likes you. Any fool could see that with half an eye this morning, and you can make him talk if anybody can. And if he won't talk, there's

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surely some one in Shorncliffe who knows his business and who will.

"I'm not asking you to do anything out of the ordinary. The same sort of thing's being done every day of the week, and you know it! A man owns a stable, and he keeps what he's doing with it as quiet as possible. Well and good. But he finds out all he can about what the rest are doing, and if they can find out what he's doing, so much the better for them. It's all in the game."

"It isn't! Other people don't spy on your horses."

"No? Then what was Colonel Cokely doing on the Heath this morning? Wasn't watching Tarantula I suppose? What did he ask you this morning? I didn't hear him, but I dare bet he asked you about Tarantula. Now didn't he?"

She did not answer him.

"Did he, or didn't he?"

She nodded.

"There you are! He came down here to find out about my horse. He came himself, and the only difference is that I can't go, and I've got to send you instead. You go down there, like a good girl, and use all the wit you've got. Get somebody to talk. Him, if possible. Then wire the information up to me. Possibly he'll take the horse across to France before he really makes up his mind whether he'll start him in the race or not. In that case, cross to France. Go to Shorncliffe and Rottingdean and Paris, even. Go anywhere where there's any one who knows a thing about Guzzling Dick, and find out everything you can.

"Why, most girls would be proud to help their fathers out of a mess, especially when they could do it so easily! See here. I'll give you a hundred pounds for exes. It's all I can raise at the moment. But if you get stuck for money, wire me and I'll get you some more somehow. I've got to know about Guzzling Dick. I'll be in Paris with Tarantula probably on the same day that Guzzling Dick gets there. If you haven't found out anything until then, get in touch with me in Paris, and keep both eyes lifting all the time. And don't let too many people know who you are!"

"Oh, I hate it!" she said. "I hate it!"

"You seem to hate doing anything to help me! All right. Don't go then. Stay here, and watch the bailiffs come in and dispossess me. They'll take all your things, and your mother's things as well as mine. They won't leave us a stick in the world. I tell you, I'll be broke as a newt. You can at least try to save me!"

"If I do this," she said, turning toward him, and looking him straight in the face, "will you promise me that it's the last time? Will you quit racing for good and all?"

"No! I won't!"

"Will you promise me that you won't ask me to take any further part in your schemes?"

"I don't know why I should, but I'll promise that if you like. A father surely has a right to ask his own daughter to help him out."

"Well, is that a promise?"

"Yes!"

"Can I go and live with my aunt at Shorncliffe for good—never have anything more to do with these stables?"

"Why, under heaven?"

"Those are my terms."

"I won't grant them!"

"Then I won't do what you ask!"

"—— it! Well, all right. If you must, you must. But I call it mean of you! Who's going to look after the house here? Who's going to look after my comfort?"

"I don't think you've ever hurt yourself considering me. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, it's a bargain."

"Very well, then, I'll go. And I'll do my best. But, mind you, I'll do nothing that seems to me too far over the line. Now tell me over again what you want me to do."

CHAPTER III

THE FOOLISHNESS OF SERGEANTS EYRE AND CRAWFORD IS DEMONSTRATED

TO SEE Sergeants Eyre and Crawford on parade, two days after their conversation in the sergeants' mess, one would never have supposed that there was such a thing as money, or a horse—still less a horse-race—within the cognizance of either of them. They looked, and were, two cleanly kept, magnificently drilled servants of the Queen, with one single purpose actuating both of them. They marched behind B Company with their rifles at the slope, in step, eyes rigid to the front as though

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that selfsame B Company were the one and only thing on earth or under heaven worthy of any one's attention. And the marching of the men in front of them was proof enough of their attention, past and present. It was perfect far beyond the appreciation of civilians.

But an hour or more later they were men again, with side ambitions of their own, and money—or the absence of it—occupied their minds once more.

"Did you borrow any?" asked Crawford, overtaking Eyre and emerging with him from the sergeants' quarters, where they had just stowed their rifles.

"Thirty shillings!" answered the giant gloomily. "Everybody's broke, it seems. Had to pick that up in shillings and half-crowns, a bit here and a bit there, however I could get it."

"Never mind," said Crawford. "Thirty bob is fine. Better than I had expected. Now, are we both agreed? Fourteen days' leave instead of seven?"

"Sure."

"Starting from this afternoon?"

"Yes."

"We sha'n't be able to put in for leave again for an awful long time."

"Who cares! The question is, will the old man grant it?"

"We're going to find that out right now, my son!"

They straightened out their tunics as they marched side by side to the orderly-room, through whose doorway they had seen Colonel Cokely disappear five minutes before. Not that their tunics needed straightening, but that was the only way that either of them allowed himself to display his nervousness.

Their quest was unusual—as unusual as the Colonel's presence in the orderly-room at that time of the morning. They should have put in their application after breakfast. But, just as Cokely had his own reasons for attending to regimental business at an unusual hour, they had perfectly sound reasons of their own for breaking with tradition.

"Who?" asked the Colonel testily.

"Sergeants Eyre and Crawford, sir."

The orderly's face betrayed neither emotion nor curiosity, although he was justified in feeling both.

"Um-m-m! Did they say what they want?"

"No, sir."

"I'll see them."

THE orderly saluted, and disappeared like a spring-built automaton, and a moment later Eyre and Crawford stood in silence before the Colonel's table.

He took no earthly notice of them; continuing to write, and apparently quite oblivious of everything except the sheet in front of him. Suddenly he looked up, though, and caught a signal passing between them—an uplifted eyebrow and a twitch of the mustache, answered by a movement of the hand.

"What is it?" he demanded.

"Apply for leave, sir!" Crawford had no words to waste apparently, and Eyre was silent.

"Both of you?"

"Yes, sir," said Eyre.

"How long?"

"Fourteen days, sir, please."

"And you?" He pointed his pen at Eyre.

"Fourteen days too, sir, please."

He leaned back in his chair and stared hard at them for quite a minute, drumming on his front teeth with his penholder. But neither of them wilted. They stood like graven images, and stared straight back at him.

"Starting when?" he demanded suddenly.

"To-day, sir; this afternoon."

"Very sudden, Crawford, isn't it? Why didn't you put in for leave this morning at the usual time? The proper course is to apply to your Company Officer; don't you know that?"

"Yes, sir, I know. This is special. Urgent private affairs, sir."

The Colonel stared hard back at him, through eyes that had narrowed by the merest trifle.

"Both urgent, both private, and both at once?" he asked.

"Yes, sir!" said Crawford.

"Yes, sir!" growled Eyre, as his eyes sought each face in turn.

"This is extraordinary! And both urgent private affairs have cropped up since orderly-room this morning—since parade, in fact—some time during the past ten minutes, eh?"

"Found a letter waiting for me after parade, sir!" said Crawford.

The Colonel's eyes switched in Eyre's direction again.

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"I got a letter too, sir!" said Eyre.

"Have you the letters with you?"

There was not even the semblance of the shadow of a smile on Cokely's face. If anything, he appeared to be concerned.

"I haven't mine, sir," said Crawford.

Eyre shook his head.

"Well—you'd better bring them. I'll wait here."

Neither man hesitated, or as much as turned a hair. They did not even look at one another.

"I tore mine up and burned it, sir," said Crawford, "and I advised Eyre here to do the same with his."

Eyre's lower lip twitched a trifle, but he gave no other sign that he felt at all relieved.

"Under favor, sir," continued Crawford, "the contents of those letters were such that we wouldn't have cared to leave them lying anywhere, or run the risk of dropping them!"

"I see. Quite important, eh? Well, you may tell me what was in them, since you can't show me. Orderly — leave the room."

The orderly retired, and closed the door behind him. Colonel Cokely waited for the weighty secret that could make two sergeants suddenly ambitious for their liberty.

"Under favor, sir," said Crawford, "this affair is private, sir, and urgent! Of course, sir, if you demand to know, I'll tell you, but I'd much rather not!"

Eyre grunted acquiescence, and Colonel Cokely hid a smile behind his hand.

"Well, now, you two men put me in a quandary. I'm not supposed to grant leave on urgent private affairs without knowing what the affairs are. Any man might come to me and make an excuse like that, and get leave of absence that wasn't justified. Your Company Officer is the right person to apply to under ordinary circumstances, and I don't at all see why I should go over his head. He can send your names up to me for regular leave of absence, on your merits. You're both men of—ah—exemplary character. I've no doubt he'd endorse your application. Why not apply to him?"

A look came into Crawford's eyes such as he took on when a squad of recruits was exceptionally slow to learn. Things happened when he wore that look. Cokely himself had seen it in Egypt once, when the camp was almost rushed by a mob of Dervishes. Eyre, looking sideways at him, noticed it and felt contented.

"Under favor, sir, if we waited till to-morrow and applied to the Comp'ny Off'cer, sir, as you say, besides being late, we'd have half the men in the Reg'ment, sir, knowing we'd put in for leave, and for how long. We'd both rather they didn't know, sir!"

"Send the orderly in here!" said Colonel Cokely. "I shall write a note to your Company Officer and ask him whether he objects. I prefer to have things done in the usual way!"

He scribbled a note, slipped it in an envelope and despatched the orderly.

"And now, I'm going to caution you two men. Of course, you've both of you got exemplary characters, and you're entitled to a very large measure of credence on that ground alone. But I know very well that if your urgent private affairs were all they ought to be, you'd have no objection in the world to telling me all about them! I believe I'm the best friend of every man in this Regiment, and I like to think that the men believe it too."

He paused, but neither of them answered.

"Anything told to me in confidence would, of course, remain a confidence!"

Still neither of them answered.

"If I give you leave on urgent private affairs, without knowing what the affairs are, or at least the nature of them, I shall be sailing very near the wind—very near indeed! I don't like to refuse you point-blank, because, as I say, you are both of you good men; and if your Company Officer has no objection——"

He paused again. Once more a signal that was almost imperceptible passed between Eyre and Crawford.

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Crawford, "but if I was to tell you the nature of it, you wouldn't grant the leave!"

"I thought as much!" said Cokely, much relieved apparently. "Now tell me all about it, and we'll see."

"Well, sir, it's this way. We know of a horse that's going to run in a certain race, and we think he can win it. But we know, too, of a certain man who's interested in his not winning. We want to bet on the horse, and we want to watch that man, and we want time to do both in without being interfered with by regimental duty. Also, sir, we'd like to see the race."

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The Colonel nodded, drumming the penholder on his desk.

"And you wanted U. P. A. for that?"

"We wanted leave, sir."

"You asked for U. P. A.! Which is the horse, and who's the owner?"

"I'd rather not say, sir!"

"How d'you know he's going to run?"

"The owner told me, sir!"

"Is he entered in any of the big races?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Ah! And within the next fourteen days! Um-m-m! The owner told you, eh? In so many words?"

"No, sir. Not in so many words."

"Um-m-m! And that letter that you got after parade this morning?"

Crawford was silent.

"Did you get one?"

"Yes, sir. We both did."

"Important letters?"

"From a bookie, sir, quoting the market odds, and offering us a certain credit."

"Ah! Well, I'm glad you didn't lie about the letters! Somehow I didn't think you'd tell an out-and-out lie."

"I didn't tell the whole truth exactly, sir. The letters were a blind, so to speak. We really got 'em, but they weren't important. I beg your pardon, sir!"

The Colonel took no notice of the apology, but sat looking at the paper in front of him, scratching with his pen. The orderly returned and handed him a note. He opened it, read it, crumpled it and tossed it in the waste-basket.

"You may leave the room again," he told the orderly. Then he looked down at the paper again.

Eyre found time to exchange another signal with Crawford. He seemed concerned by this time, but Crawford appeared strangely at his ease.

"Don't you think," said the Colonel, still staring at the paper on his desk, "that, for men who are certainly not rich, the best course is, when you think that a horse is likely to be pulled, or doped, or interfered with, to—ah—let the horse alone? Not bet on him, I mean?"

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Crawford, "but, betting aside, I'd like to see that horse win, and I'd hate to see his owner double-crossed or anything like that!"

"Is the owner a friend of yours?"

"I've heard him say so, sir!"

Colonel Cokely bit his lower lip, and turned to see whether the note he had crumpled up had fallen into the waste-basket or not. Eyre writhed, slightly but quite perceptibly, down the whole length of his six feet seven inches. But Crawford stood like a statue, with his jaw set and the same look in his eyes as before.

"Well, now," said Colonel Cokely, looking up, "I see your Company Officer raises no objection; so I'll give you two men ordinary leave of absence for fourteen days, beginning from this afternoon. Let me see —what else?"

"We'd like leave to wear civilian clothes, sir!"

"With permission to don civilian clothing when outside barracks," said the Colonel, writing. "Is that all?"

Crawford hesitated, and Eyre nudged him.

"Would that mean permission to go *anywhere*, sir?" he asked after a moment. "We'd hate to be arrested for deserters!"

"And leave to go abroad," wrote the Colonel, reading the five words aloud. "It's a good thing you thought of that. I'd have had you both arrested myself, if I'd happened to see you out of England without permission. Very well. That'll do. Here's your permit."

They saluted, and retired in military order, marching out in single file with their eyes in front of them. But once outside, their military bearing gave place to almost human attitudes. Had an orderly and one or two privates not been looking at them, it seemed as though they might almost have shaken hands, or laughed.

"Why didn't we tell him the whole thing right from the word go?" asked Eyre, repressing a desire to shout.

"I told you we was both —— fools!" said Crawford.

CHAPTER IV

TWO UNEXPECTED INTERVIEWS AT ROTTINGDEAN

A MILE or more from Rottingdean, where the Tonbridge Road curled like a river between two grass-clad downs, a little racing-stable, neat, clean as a new pin and looking strangely up-to-date amid its wild surroundings, nestled in a sort of bay between the hills. And another half mile from the stables, on the Brighton side,

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there stood a row of cottages that were far less up-to-date. One had a thatched roof. Two others were roofed with wood. All of them were ramshackle and disheveled-looking. They were like left-overs of the Regency, leaky, time-touseled remnants of a quite inglorious past. But they were occupied.

From one of them there stepped a short, lean ferret of a man, who might have been a jockey in his palmier days. He walked with a slight stoop, and carried his chin thrust forward. It required little imagination to set a jockey-cap on him and clothe him again in barred silk jacket and top-boots and spurs. He did not look altogether unprosperous, for his clothes were well-fitting, if a trifle loud in cut and pattern.

But there was something furtive in his attitude, something between brazen impudence and an abject readiness to cringe; a hungry "what-next" expression and unhealthy-looking pimples on his hatchet face that told of low living and low funds in the not-so-very-distant past.

He pushed both hands deep down into his pockets and yawned at the sky-line dismally.

"Toutin' ain't bad!" he muttered, "when you're paid like this for it, it ain't! But I could wish things was a little liver! Ten pound a week between 'em for loafin' here is A No. 1 all right, but—— Who's that?"

ROUND the bend of the road there walked a vision of loveliness—loveliness in something of a hurry. Even the raincoat that she wore, open in front and hanging raincoat-wise in most ungainly folds, failed to hide the grace of her almost girlish figure, and her haste had brought the roses mounting to her cheeks. She looked like Diana blushing, Diana angry with herself and with the universe, but none the less Diana, treading on youth's springs and glancing, as she hurried, from left to right at a countryside that seemed all the sweeter for her coming.

She passed the hatched-faced man who had expressed surprise at seeing her, and he had almost thought himself mistaken. But she was scarcely two yards past him when she turned her head, and almost hissed at him:

"Don't speak to me! But watch where I go, and follow!"

Cap-and-gaiters looked the other way, a little ostentatiously, and even walked the other way a dozen yards or so. Then he turned, and when her graceful, willowy figure had disappeared round the corner of a barn that jutted out toward the road a quarter of a mile away, he followed.

"Why, Miss Jolliffe, this is a treat for fair!" he exclaimed, as he reached the corner of the barn and found her waiting for him just beyond it. "Fancy meeting you!"

"Never mind about greetings, Strivens. I'm——"

"Hush, Miss Jolliffe! I'm Harry Singer, round these parts."

"Very well. I'll remember. Now, what have you found out? Anything?"

"Not a thing, Miss Jolliffe, not a thing, except that the Colonel's stable's so closely guarded that a rat couldn't find his way in without a permit. I've talked to the boys, and I got one of 'em down to Brighton and made him drunk. But the fact is, there's none of 'em knows a thing."

"Do they know who you are, or why you're here?"

"No, Miss Jolliffe; they think I'm toutin' for the *Sportin' Daily Times*, and that my name's Harry Singer, as I told you."

"How long are you to stay here?"

"I couldn't say, Miss Jolliffe. Your father's s'posed to be payin' me five a week, and Mr. Pike's payin' me another five. If your father was to tell me to quit, I couldn't without orders from Mr. Pike as well, you see."

"That's all I wanted to know. You expect to stay here for quite some time yet—probably until the horses leave for Paris? That's what my father gave me to understand. I'm down here on the same errand as you are, and I want you to work as far as possible with me."

"Well, come inside the barn here, Miss Jolliffe! We're less likely to be seen in there, and if we're goin' to work together we don't want nobody to know it, see? We can talk all we want to in there, without bein' overheard."

She followed him inside the barn, where he pointed out a pile of sacks and hay and tarpaulins to her. She sat down, and he stood up in front of her, or paced up and down with his hands deep in his pockets.

"We're not runnin' this game right, y'know, Miss Jolliffe!" he complained to her. "Y'see, your father, Miss, he seems

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too tight with the purse-strings, and I don't know, I'm sure, what's the trouble between him and Mr. Pike. Mr. Pike is none too flush by all accounts, except with his promises, and I don't get my money so reg'lar as I'd like from either of 'em. But still, it comes. I can't complain. But there's more to it than that. Mr. Pike's all the while writin' me to get him the info and slip it to him on the strict q. t., and your father's doin' the same thing. They're both supposed to be payin' me, and they're both of 'em tellin' me behind the other's back to double-cross the other one! It don't seem right for me to tell you all this, but me an' you's been pals ever since I rode your father's horses, haven't we, Miss?"

She winced perceptibly, but he seemed not to notice it. Perhaps he did not want to. That kind of man clings almost desperately to friends who have not yet lost their caste, and needs more than a little shaking off. Jockeys who have been warned off the turf for foul riding and other things have tender memories as a rule for their palmier days.

"Well, Miss, I wrote to Mr. Pike four days ago and told him I hadn't any info yet, an' he wrote back an' told me 'Buy it!' He said in his letter that a hundred pounds'd buy anything in the shape o' news, and that he was sending me a hundred in a letter that'd reach me some time to-day. When you showed up, I was just startin' for Brighton to see whether the letter was at the post-office yet or not. He said in his letter that if I couldn't get what he wants with that hundred, it'd be the last transaction he would ever have with me, and he said he'd expect the info within two days of my receipt of the hundred. Now, o' course, Miss Jolliffe, I could take that hundred and clear off with it. But if I did that, Mr. Pike'd send my name round, and once the hundred was spent there'd be no means of makin' any more. And I'm in a devil of a bad fix either way! S'posin' I double-cross him—take the hundred, I mean, and get the info and tell your father by the same mail as I tell Mr. Pike? He'll send my name round just the same! And s'posin' I do what he says. Then your father'll work all the plans he knows to get me broke! And s'posin' I tell your father, an' not Pike, what then? Pike'll have it in for me! And s'posin' there's nothin' doin'. I'm in the same boat, ain't I? They'll both swear I'm a crook, and do their level best to put me out o' business!"

"You might return the hundred," she suggested.

"I'd hardly like to do that, Miss! Y'see a hundred pounds is a hundred, and mighty hard to get! And Mr. Pike knows very well that I'd make my little commish on the deal. I'd hardly like to be that to the bad."

"Well, I haven't anything to do with Mr. Pike, Strivens——"

"Beg pardon, Miss, but you're forgettin' already. I'm Harry Singer round these parts, and not Tom Strivens! You want to get that into your head, and call me Singer, or Harry, whichever you like, all the time, so's not to make mistakes!"

"Very well, Harry Singer. What I was going to say is this. I don't know anything about this Mr. Pike——"

"He's Mr. Charlton Pike, of Harwich."

"I don't care who he is either. He's got nothing whatever to do with me, nor I with him. All I know about him, or want to know, is that my father trains his horses, and that I cordially wish he didn't! Now your duty to my father is clear. You're down here drawing his pay to do certain work for him, aren't you? Well, then, do it! I don't care how you get the information, and in fact that's none of my business. But *get* it! If you're afraid to send the information to my father direct, you can send it to me at my address in Shorncliffe, and I'll forward it to him."

Strivens—or rather Harry Singer—shook his head.

"That'd be all the same, Miss!" he answered. "If I tell 'em both, or tell Pike and you, Pike'll have it in for me. He'll guess your father got it from me all right!"

"I'll promise, then, to tell Mr. Pike myself that it was I who sent the information to my father, and I'll persuade my father to tell him the same thing. I'll have my father send him a telegram, if you like, telling him that he's just got information through me."

"Will you really, Miss?"

"Certainly, I will! I'm not afraid of Mr. Pike; and if he chooses to bribe my father's servants, or try to bribe them, I haven't any compunction at all in taking advantage of him."

"Oh, as for that, Miss, I'd double-cross

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Pike in a minute. It's what he'll do to me afterward that frightens me."

"Well, now, I've given you my promise. Will you do your best and send me the information the minute that you have it?"

"Yes, Miss! Have you any idea what they're so keen to know for whether Guzzling Dick runs or not?"

"Not I. And I don't want to know! It's my last connection with the turf in any shape or form. My father asked me to come down here and do this, and I agreed on that condition. I'm never going back to Newmarket again!"

"It looks to me as if they're trying to trim each other, Miss. Don't it to you?"

"I—I—I hope it's nothing worse than that," said Jane Jolliffe, searching in the pocket of her raincoat. "Here, Singer, here's my address at Shorncliffe. I'll write it on the back of this envelope. Now keep that by you, and wire or write or send a messenger to me the moment that you have the information!"

"Very well, Miss! It's a treat for sore eyes to have seen you again, looking so young and pretty!"

"It's nice of you to say that—er—Singer. However, I must go now. I'm going to turn Shorncliffe upside down, to see whether there's any information to be picked up there. Wait in here, please, until I'm out of sight, round the bend in the road below there. Don't let people suspect that we even know each other!"

"Very well, Miss!"

SHE slipped out quickly through the door, and started down the road as fast as her dainty feet would carry her. And after watching her for half a minute Harry Singer sat down on the pile of tarpaulins and old sacks to wait.

"No you don't!" growled a voice beneath him suddenly, and the top tarpaulin began all at once to heave.

Harry Singer sprang from the heap like a shot buck, and made a dive toward the door, almost screaming in his terror. But from behind an old cobweb-hung seed-cleaning-machine a man dashed out and forestalled him. Sergeant Crawford, with his splendid shoulders undisguised by ill-cut civilian raiment, stood with his back to the door, and smiled at him from under a golden-brown mustache. His eyes smiled too, and he was quite evidently pleased in every fiber of his being.

And from underneath the piled-up sacks and tarpaulins a giant unfolded himself, a few feet at a time, stretching himself luxuriously, but not grinning yet by any means.

"Did you get enough air to breathe there, Eyre?" asked Crawford, his blue eyes twinkling.

"I did not! Being sat on by a woman's no joke, let me tell you! I'd have been dead if she'd stayed five minutes longer!"

"Are you chaps 'tecs?" asked Harry Singer in an awestruck voice, and both men laughed together.

"No. We're not detectives, my son!" said Crawford. "But we've detected you for fair! Sit down on that pile o' sacks now, and behave yourself, while I explain things to you!"

CHAPTER V

SERGEANTS CRAWFORD AND EYRE CONNECT WITH FUNDS, AND COLONEL COKELY KEEPS A SECRET

HARRY SINGER took his seat on the disarranged tarpaulins as directed, looking from one man to the other with a brave attempt to take the situation as a joke.

"Now, boys," he said, with a smile that twitched jerkily, "let's hear the story! I'm listenin'!"

He noticed that either of the men was twice his size at least, and he was uncomfortably conscious of the fact that touts can look for no protection from the law when caught red-handed. Should their captor deem a thrashing suitable and just, or even needful to his own amusement, they have to take it and be thankful—that it wasn't worse!

"I don't know what my mate here heard," said Crawford. "He was maybe kind o' smothered. But, speakin' strictly personally, I heard every word that you and that woman said!"

"I heard most of it!" said Eyre, still feeling at his joints, and bending them to and fro for the sheer joy of being able to move again.

"And I got a good look at her!" said Crawford. "I would know her again among a thousand!"

"Well?" asked Harry Singer. "I'm listenin'!"

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"I heard what you said about that man Pike, for instance!"

"Well, boys, you don't mean to tell me that you'll go and report what I said to him? What good's that going to do either of you?"

"You're a bit too previous!" said Crawford, who, as has been said already, was the thinker of the Crawford-Eyre combine. "Don't squeal before you're hit! When you are hit, you'll know it!"

The man who chose to be known as Singer eyed him narrowly. A sickening sensation of physical fear was creeping up and down his spine, and bringing the cold sweat out along his forearms. He was far from any kind of help, and in the enemy's country in any case. He could not make a bolt for it, for Crawford was between him and the door, and he had no weapon of any kind with which even to try to scare his captors. His case seemed hopeless, and Crawford spoke slowly and deliberately, giving him plenty of time to let the realization of his predicament sink in.

"I overheard, too," said Crawford, "that your right name isn't Singer. That's neither here nor there, and doesn't matter. We know what your real name is, and who your employers are, and you can call yourself anything you —— well please, for all we'll do to stop you. But there's no doubt as to who we are, and when the right time comes—which is to say presently—I'll tell you!"

"All right, boys!" said Singer, in his most propitiatory voice. "I'm not sayin' you aren't any one! It don't make no difference to me. You've caught me red-'anded, for fair. I'm nothin' but a poor jay tryin' to get a livin' the only way I know how to, and you boys don't look like the ones to break my neck for it. We all gotter live, yer know!"

He was on the verge of blubbering. His eyes were nearly starting from his head, and he fidgeted on the bundle of tarpaulins like a rat when he smells fire.

"There are ways and ways of living," answered Crawford. "Now my friend here and myself are not exactly keen on giving you a hiding. You deserve it, mind you! But I'd as soon thrash a baby in arms as thrash you. You're not big enough!"

"Sure I'm not big enough!" said Harry Singer. "It wouldn't be a man's act for two big men like you to set on one little jay like me."

"See sense, then!" said Crawford grimly.

"I'll see sense, boys! You've got me for fair. I'll do anything you say."

"WELL, now, listen here! You've come sneaking down here to find out, if you can, whether Colonel Cokely's horse Guzzling Dick's going to run in the Grand Prix or not, and there's this man Pike sending you a hundred pounds to pay for the information if you can find any one who'll sell it. That right?"

"Yes, that's right! If you two fellers are connected with the stables, and know what's doin', and can prove it, I'd as soon pay you the money as anybody! I'm not particular. All I want is the info—straight—and it's all one to me who I gets it from!"

"We're not looking for any dirty money!" said Crawford in his pleasantest voice. "But we want that hundred clean! Also we're going to get it!"

"Now, listen, boys," pleaded the shivering ex-jockey. "Be reasonable! I haven't got that hundred on me. So help me, I haven't! It's at the post-office down at Brighton, miles from here. Search me if you want to. Here! I'll turn my pockets out! Look!"

He began to turn his pockets inside out, tossing all his loose change and a single five-pound Bank of England note on the floor in front of him. "There, boys, that's all the cash I've got!" he told them.

"You —— little swab!" said Crawford, grinning in spite of himself. "What do you take us for? Sneaks like yourself, or what? Pick that money up. Put it back in your pocket. Now, listen."

The ex-jockey did as he was bid. He was beginning to feel less uncomfortable, and to look it.

"We two men have got the information that you want!" said Crawford.

"Well, didn't I say I'd buy it from you?"

"I heard you say so—yes! No, don't punch him, Eyre. He's not big enough! Keep your hands to yourself. I'll deal with him."

Eyre, who had had no real intention of hitting anything so much smaller than himself, leaned up against the barn wall and discontinued his demonstration of disgust.

"As I said, we've got the information—and as I didn't say yet, we mean to keep it to ourselves, and make good use of it! You know as well as I do how it is. There are

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only two horses to be seriously reckoned with in that race, and they're Tarantula and Guzzling Dick. There's nothing else that has a chance if those two run. And if Guzzling Dick doesn't run, then Tarantula's a cert! That right?"

"Sure, that's right!"

"But he isn't by any means a cert if Guzzling Dick does run."

"Certainly."

"Very well. The man who knows whether Guzzling Dick will run or not stands an eighteen-carat chance of making money. Do you follow that?"

"Sure. He'll know which horse to bet on."

"Very well. Now I'm going to tell you something, a fact that isn't generally known as yet—one that I'll bet you don't know. Guzzling Dick will be taken over to Paris, whether he runs in the Grand Prix or not. The mere fact that he goes over there doesn't necessarily mean that he'll run. D'you understand?"

Harry Singer nodded. There was nothing unusual in that arrangement.

"My friend here and I will be going over with him."

"On the same boat?"

"Maybe—maybe not—there's no knowing yet. We're going to put our bets on now, though. We're going to wire the money over to Flushing at the present market odds, d'you get me?"

"Yes. Go on."

"Well. Here's this man Pike that you're touting for. He's sent you a hundred pounds, hasn't he? Are you going to send the money back?"

"You bet I am—not! What d'you take me for?"

"I take you for what you are—a mean little sneak, that's made up his mind to double-cross somebody, or else two people! Mind you, I don't care about Pike, or Jolliffe the trainer, either, for that matter. I'd like to see Pike lose his hundred and get nothing in return for it!"

He thought for a minute, scratching at his iron-shot temples and eying the ex-jockey up and down as though he were appraising him.

"How much have you got besides that hundred?" he demanded suddenly.

"I've shown you."

"None in the bank? None stowed away anywhere?"

"None here, anyhow."

"I said anywhere."

"I might lay my hands on fifty."

"Good! Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"WELL, then, my friend and I are going to take you into partnership. As I see it, either Pike or Jolliffe are going to break you, whichever way the cat jumps. You're a hundred to the good, and you can't get any further. We'll give you a sporting chance, and stand in with you. You finance the deal, and we provide the information. D'you follow? We bet with your money, and give you a one-third share—share and share alike in other words. How's that?"

"You mean you'll tell me now whether Guzzling Dick's going to run or not?"

"No! I do not! I won't tell you anything! I'll take your money, and my friend here and I will put it on whichever of the two horses we see fit, and share up what we win with you—share and share alike. Leave it, if you don't like it. You know what'll happen then! In the first place, we'll give you your deserts. No! we won't touch you. We'll take you down to the Colonel's stables and let you get 'em there. Come on down there if you prefer it!"

"No, boys! No—no—no! I'm not making any fuss! Go on and tell me what's your plan. I'll agree to anything in reason."

"Well, the way you stand is this. You've got your choice of putting up one hundred and fifty pounds, and standing an equal chance with us of cleaning up three or four hundred on a square deal—or of getting a thrashing and keeping your money, and being boycotted by Pike and Jolliffe and everybody else in the racing game. Colonel Cokely can do you much more harm than either o' them could, and we'll see that he does it, if you don't agree! Mind you, you don't deserve such a chance. You wouldn't get it if we had money of our own, and you wouldn't get it if we happened to be crooks, like you are! We could turn you upside down, and whop you until you agreed to anything!"

"There's no need to talk about hittin' me, boys! I'm not arguin'! But, tell me, how am I goin' to know whether you're what you say you are? I've a right to know that!"

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Crawford bared his arm, and Harry Singer winced. He thought it was a preliminary to violence. But Crawford only showed him an intricate design in blue and red that was tattooed on the inside of his forearm.

"Look at that!" he ordered, and Singer looked.

"That's the regimental crest and motto of the Right and Tight. Those, underneath, are my initials. I'm Sergeant Crawford, of B Company, the Right and Tight, and this here's Sergeant Eyre—same company, same regiment. We're both men who're known—we're known to every bookie in the silver ring, and to lots of others."

"All the same, boys, it's pretty much like robbery, isn't it, making me agree to hand over my money like that?"

"Call it what you like! We don't either of us pretend that we're offering you a cert, or even the best end of it. But we've caught you engaging in a plot to get information you've no right to and spoil the market for our Colonel, and we're acting in his interests by preventing you from doing it. If you fall down on Pike and Jolliffe, that puts you in bad with them, and the best way I know of to make you mind your own business is keep you out of other people's. The plan happens to suit us too, but that's an incident."

"Well, see here. I'll agree to give you two men fifty, if you'll let me go, and tell me what you know! I'll hold my tongue about it—straight, I will!"

Crawford laughed at him outright. "You've a right to call us fools!" he answered. "If we were ordinary wise men, instead of fools with consciences, we'd have blackmailed you out of every cent you've got, and given you nothing in exchange! We're not fools enough to believe, though, that you would hold your tongue! Whichever way you talked, you'd spoil things. If Guzzling Dick isn't going to run, Colonel Cokely wants to bet on Tarantula. That's a cert. And he won't get more than even money if the crowd finds out in advance that he's not running Guzzling Dick. And supposing it's the other way round. The minute the bookies know that Guzzling Dick's sure to run, up goes his price to somewhere near evens too, instead of tens, or even more. At the present moment we can get tens at least about either horse, and we're going to get it, with your money, on whichever horse we pick to win. Then, if we lose, you lose, and if we win, you win! That's all there is about it! Come on, now, choose! Time's up!"

IF TOM STRIVENS—or Harry Singer—had been another type of man, or if he had been more habitually prosperous, or more indebted to either of his employers, he would very likely have held out, and might have refused point-blank. But a jockey who has been "warned off," and who has had to take to touting for his living, is an easy mark for men who have any strength of character. He is weak in the first place, or he would have never stooped to practises that were low enough to bring about his downfall. And the kind of life a tout leads is not calculated to strengthen his resolution or his loyalty to any one. A tout is treated like a mongrel by the men who hire him and the men who know his business, and the treatment seeps into his soul and rots him. Crawford was counting on just that fact.

"There's one thing, boys—Miss Jolliffe. What about her? What'll I tell her?"

"Tell her nothing!" growled Eyre, taking a sudden interest in the discussion. "Leave her to me! Where's that address she gave you?"

"I'll not stand for any tricks with her!" said Singer, hardening at once. "You've both got to promise me that you won't harm her in any way. On those terms I'll agree to your plan. If not—go ahead—I'll go to the stables with you!"

"Harming women isn't in our line, thanks!" growled Eyre.

"We won't do a thing to her," said Crawford.

"We want her address, though," said Eyre. "We could soon find her," he added. "You can save us the trouble, that's all."

"Now look here. You fellers are not goin' to hold her up for money, are you? 'Cause——"

"Oh, stow it!" growled Crawford and Eyre both together.

"You seem to think we're as rotten as you are!" added Eyre. "Now, are you coming?"

"Where to?"

"To the post-office, I suppose," said Crawford. "How are you getting that money—by check?"

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"No. By money-order. I couldn't cash a check."

"Good. Come along, then, and get the money-order — and consider yourself —— lucky, my son, that you've got off so light, with a third share in a pretty nearly absolute dead-cert!"

THEY filed out of the barn, all three of them together, with the diminutive and hollow-chested Singer between the straight-backed soldiers. He looked almost like a child, as he struggled to keep pace with them. They trudged in silence until they reached the bay between the hills where Colonel Cokely's racing-stable lay half-hidden from the road.

Then "Shall we salute?" asked Eyre suddenly. Some one they recognized was sitting on a chestnut horse, ten yards or more from the roadside, and talking to another man in a tweed suit and cap, who stood by his stirrup in an attitude of respectful confidence.

"Better not, I guess," said Crawford. "Perhaps he won't see us, and maybe he'd rather not, and we're none of us in uniform. Just walk on."

They tramped on in silence—military-looking as Mars himself, in spite of their ill-fitting, cheap, ready-made suits, and they passed the horseman without so much as glancing at him.

"Weren't that the Colonel?" asked Harry Singer when they had passed.

"It was!" said Crawford.

"Then how was it he didn't recognize you two?" asked Singer. "I believe this is all a fake! I don't believe that either of you knows a thing!"

"Come on back, then!" said Crawford, seizing his arm and stopping. "We'll soon show you whether he recognizes us or not!"

"No—no—no! Come on, boys! I believe you!"

From the high vantage-point of his seventeen-hand horse, Colonel Cokely stared after them, and smiled, a little grimly.

"D'you know those two big men?" he asked.

"No, sir!" said the trainer. "At least, I only saw their backs. I won't be sure."

"D'you know the little one?"

"Sure! That's a tout named Harry Singer."

"His real name's Strivens!" said the Colonel. "Tom Strivens."

"Not the man who used to ride for Jolliffe?"

"The same man."

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Quite! What's more, he's the man who injured a horse of John Taylor's once, an hour or two before a race. It was never proved against him, but I was certain of it at the time. Those two men with him are sergeants of mine, and hitherto I've always thought they were to be trusted. Have a care, Jennings—have a care! Keep a bright lookout for that man Strivens, or Singer, or whatever he calls himself. See to it that he doesn't get at Guzzling Dick!"

"He hasn't an earthly chance, sir. The Guzzler's too well guarded."

"Let's hope not, at all events. Those two sergeants could be more dangerous than he is, if they'd a mind to be. They're both capable men. I don't think they'd do anything against me. I'm nearly sure they wouldn't. But I heard a hint dropped yesterday, and they're in bad company at present."

"I wish you'd take me more into your confidence, sir. It'd make things a lot easier!"

"Nonsense, Jennings! Things are infinitely easier for you as they are. As it is, you know nothing, and your duty's clear! Have the horse ready for the Grand Prix. Do your best, and have him tuned up like a fiddle-string. I'll decide whether he will run or not in my own good time."

"Is he to go to Paris, sir, in any case?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, sir, with all respect, I'd like to have a bet on him myself, if he's going to run, and so would all the stable-hands. We'd like to know in time to get the money down."

"Did you ever know me to forget your interests, Jennings? If the Guzzler runs, I'll put a good fat bet down for you, and another that will cover at least as much money as the boys could wager on their own account. You do your duty, and see that the boys do theirs, and you can trust me to look after all of you. Good morning."

And Colonel Cokely rode off in the direction of Brighton, with his secrets still inside his head, and a smile on his face that was inscrutable. Not a man who had seen him, though, would have accused him for a moment of being anything but perfectly at ease, both in mind and body.

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CHAPTER VI

JANE JOLLIFFE ATTENDS A REVIEW, AND WISHES SHE HAD STAYED AT HOME

SYSTEM is, of course, the secret of the training of an army. System in everything, from the choosing of recruits and the drafting of them to the different regiments, all the way up to the issuing of General Orders. The English army has its system as a whole—an all-embracing one. Inside that, although a part of it, each regiment has another system of its own, based on precedent and past history, and precepts laid down by long-since-dead commanding officers.

This inner system-within-a-system has a tendency to change, just as the greater, Government-controlled one does. For each commanding officer has his own individual way of interpreting the rules-that-be. And it is just that little individual touch from its commander, tactfully or foolishly applied as fate and his good sense determine, that is likely to make a Regiment uncertain of itself, or else send it, when the time comes, roaring like one spring-bound unconquerable unit at the exact second to the exact place where it is wanted. Just as in civilian life, it is mainly the little things that count, and the little things are not so very different.

Colonel the Honorable Kingston Cokely's chief characteristic—if such a lover of the unexpected may be said to have come within any characteristic confines whatever—was a habit of doing what he chose to, when he liked, and without reference to any one's opinion. With one exception, the Regiment could never tell what it would be told to do, nor when, nor even why, as a general rule. It had to be ready to do the unexpected at a moment's notice, and to do it properly. His system, in fact, amounted to a series of surprises. But the one exception was important.

Thursday afternoons were traditionally and inviolably sacred to the rank and file—their one day off, on which all unnecessary duties were excused them. It, so to speak, rounded up the week, and on Friday morning they began another week of systematized surprises. So, on Wednesday afternoons it was Colonel Cokely's absolutely fixed habit to review the Regiment in full marching order. Except on the extremely rare occasions when he was absent from the Regiment on Wednesdays (and then the senior major would attend to it), he would sit his charger by the saluting-point on the parade-ground, and the Regiment would march past him in quarter-column. It made no difference what the Regiment had done that day, or how tired the men were, or whether it rained or not. On Wednesday afternoon the Regiment marched past.

And when it had marched past, he halted it, and fronted it, and stood the men at ease, and gave them a talking to. If things were well, he told them so ungrudgingly, making no secret of his pride in them or of his own opinion that the Right and Tight was much the finest Regiment in the army. And if things were wrong—even the least bit wrong—they were apt to hear that, too. If he could praise, until the meanest scapegrace in the ranks conceived new theories on life, he could blame as well. He could scarify. He could drawl out acidulated comment—the more biting because it was couched in scholarly and gentlemanly English—until officer and man alike would feel the shame growing into his inmost private soul, and nothing in the world but regimental perfection would seem worth while. He seldom had to blame the Regiment two Wednesdays running.

There was no other engagement that he bound himself down to rigidly, and there was no other place or time but on that parade-ground on a Wednesday afternoon that one might be sure of finding him. He who knew—and there were several wise ones—could always be sure of finding him by the saluting-point on Wednesday afternoon, and for fifteen minutes, while the men rested preparatory to marching past, there was a chance to talk to him.

SO, AS time went on, there came to be quite merry—quite informal—little social gatherings at the saluting-point on Wednesdays. It came to be recognized as a general meeting-place among his set, especially as it became known that Colonel Cokely would accept his friends' presence there in the light of a call, or a call returned. And, of course, since the socially great of Shorncliffe went there regularly, the socially small would come there too, to stare at them. And it took Jane Jolliffe precisely two hours after her arrival

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at her aunt's to become acquainted with the fact.

Her social position at Shorncliffe was far different from what she suffered under at Newmarket. Here her father's private reputation was unknown. It was known that he trained horses, for his name, of course, was often in the papers, and, besides, she made no secret of the fact. But there are more different brands of trainers than of almost any other profession in the world. There are noblemen among them, and yeomen, retired jockeys and promoted grooms, parsons and soldiers and, in fact, almost every kind of man.

On the whole, the fact that he trains horses is rather in a man's favor socially, until he gets found out, and his daughter need suffer nothing on that ground. She need not, but she often does, and Jane Jolliffe was a case in point. She suffered agonies, though not at Shorncliffe. There, she was recognized for what she was—a pretty, merry English girl who was healthy in mind and body; good to look at, good to talk to and perfectly good to know. She made no pretense of belonging to the upper classes, and neither did her aunt, who was the widow of a contractor. But, being thoroughly nice women, they both had the entrée almost everywhere.

The aunt was one of those who attended the Wednesday saluting-point affairs. She was not even on nodding terms with Colonel Cokely, but she did know nearly everybody else who went there, and she was able to meet acquaintances on those occasions who might otherwise have dropped out of her little world. In other words, she was at the social stage where others set the pace. She had to keep up or be distanced. So she attended these informal meetings regularly, and on the first Wednesday afternoon following her niece's arrival on the scene she took Jane with her.

JANE went with rather a fluttering at the heart. It might seem like a very little thing to go and watch a man review his Regiment. But, trainer's daughter or not, Jane Jolliffe had a fund of clean-kept pride, and Colonel Cokely had scarcely displayed enthusiasm for her acquaintance at Newmarket once he had discovered who she was. But for her promise to her father, her ambition to have done with horse-racing for good and all and the apparent impossibility of meeting the Colonel elsewhere except by an appointment that she dared not ask for, she would have died, almost, rather than have gone there. But there seemed nothing else to do.

The crowd was considerable that Wednesday, and since fifteen minutes was all too short a time for every one who knew him personally to get word with the Colonel, he became the center of a buzzing swarm of men and women. Ten minutes passed, and he had not yet noticed Jane Jolliffe, standing with her aunt on the outside of the crowd. She felt that she must attract his attention somehow, even though she hated herself for doing it, for get word with him she must.

Every other attempt to find out about his horse had failed. She had asked people until they had set her down as a crazy woman with a strange obsession or else as a stupid country girl with only one line of conversation, and that an uninteresting one. She had tried to get invitations to places where she might meet him, and in some cases she had failed. Where she did get invitations, she had not found him. And she had deliberately, openly, shamelessly asked more than one person to introduce her to Colonel Cokely. No one had refused her, but every one had pleaded inability, on the absolutely truthful ground that the Colonel was impossible to catch.

Now, then, was her one slim chance, and she must use it! She had made up her mind exactly what to do. She would ask him for an appointment, to last five minutes only, at any time or place he cared to name, where what she had to say would not be overheard. Then, having got the appointment, she would meet him, and ask him bluntly, honestly, without any attempt at beating about the bush, whether Guzzling Dick would run or not! He might laugh, or he might be angry. He might be rude, or conceivably he might tell her. Whatever he did, she would at least have kept her promise, and have done her best to find out.

So she lowered her parasol, with a sudden whirling movement that was likely to call attention to her. Hers was the only parasol. It was distinctly noticeable, and Colonel Cokely's eyes were raised for half a second. She bowed and smiled at him. But he evidently did not see her, for his eyes looked down again, and he went on

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talking to a lady in the crowd. At least, she hoped he did not see her! She walked a little nearer to him, still outside the crowd, and repeated the maneuver. It served only to call the attention of several of the crowd to her. Nine or ten of them turned round and stared.

The lady to whom Cokely was talking at that moment turned her head and stared particularly hard, and that forced the Colonel to raise his eyes and look again in Jane's direction. She was nearer to him this time. She could have touched his charger with the end of her parasol. He could not fail to see her now, and recognize her too, unless he had an exceedingly short memory for faces. So she bowed and smiled.

Women know the awfulness of what came after. Men are too inured to the world's brutality to appreciate the sting of it. It takes a blow or abuse or written words to reach to the quick of a man's sensitiveness. But a girl—a good, sweet, modest girl such as Jane Jolliffe was—spurred on by her own pluck and her sense of loyalty to lay herself open, unguarded, to a public snub, feels that snub more keenly, when she receives it, than she would a dozen blows.

Half of the crowd, at least, was staring at her. They even began to make way for her, moving to make a little passage in between them by which she might approach the Colonel. They found her worth looking at, and, knowing the Colonel's tastes where women were concerned, there was nobody who doubted he would speak to her. She blushed and smiled again and lowered her parasol a little nervously, and she almost started to take advantage of the opening the crowd had made for her. She spent hours that night in thanking Providence that the one last awfullest indignity was spared her.

The Colonel stared—blankly. He looked straight at her—not past her, or over her head, but down at her from where he towered on his enormous charger above the little crowd. He looked for twenty seconds, before he saluted her perfunctorily, as though there must have been some mistake and she were some one that he did not know or recognize. Then he wheeled his charger round, with his back toward her, and excused himself.

"The Regiment!" he explained to the people nearest him. "The one thing in the world, you know, that a man has to take seriously! Will you forgive me?"

TWO or three minutes later, the plain was shaking to the quick-step tramp of the Right and Tight; line after long red line of them passing the saluting-point to a tune that more than half the world has heard at one time or another. Facing the glittering band across the moving phalanx sat the Colonel, returning the companies' salutes, and ten paces to the right of him and a pace or two behind, stood Jane Jolliffe. There was a gap, a quite distinct gap, between her and the little crowd that clustered behind the Colonel. She might have been a leper.

But there was worse to come. The serried companies reached the end of the parade ground, and the band ceased playing with a crash. With another stiff, perfunctory salute to his acquaintances the Colonel spurred his charger to a canter, and rode to where the Regiment waited for him, to receive his weekly verdict. And as though a force that held them had suddenly been released, there was a little movement in the crowd as each neck turned, and everybody present took a hurried, keen, inquiring look at Jane again.

And as they looked—right under the eyes of every one of them—a small, mean-looking man in cap and gaiters, apparently a little gone in drink, walked up to her and addressed her familiarly.

She heard a dowager say, "So that's the reason, is it!"

And the next thing that she heard was the voice of Harry Singer, or Tom Strivens, calling her "Miss Jane," and telling her that she wouldn't be seeing him again for quite some time. He even laid his hand familiarly on her sleeve, and she was too overcome by sensations she could not have analyzed to shake it off. She let it stay there, and stood listening to him like a woman in a trance.

"Come away, dear!" said her aunt. But she stayed to hear what Strivens had to say, for nothing mattered now.

"It's this way, 'Miss," he told her. "There's no sense at all in my staying on at Rottingdean. There's nothing to be found out there. The stable's guarded like it was Buckin'ham Palace, and there ain't a boy there who would talk, drunk or sober, even if he knew anything, which they all

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don't. But I've found a couple o' gents that do know something. They're mighty close about it, but I think I can get 'em to talk if I stick to 'em close. I'm going where they're going. Maybe I'm going across to France. Maybe I won't find out anything till the last minute. Maybe I will. There's no knowin'. And see here, Miss." He came half a step nearer to her, to whisper in her ear, and she could smell that his breath reeked of whisky. "If there's any dirty work going to be done, keep clear of it! My advice is—*quit!*" He almost spat the last word at her, in a raucous whisper. Then he turned and went, with the easy swagger of a man who believes he has done his duty, and is no longer responsible for what may happen.

JANE JOLLIFFE was too dazed and mortified to realize his meaning at the moment, or even to care what he might mean. She barely felt her aunt take her by the arm and draw her away in the direction of home. And she was too dazed to notice that the giant of a man who stopped her presently, and raised his hat respectfully, wore clothes that did not fit him overwell.

"Excuse me, Miss, please," he said in an abrupt voice that seemed to rumble up from somewhere down below the middle of him, "but weren't you talking just now to Harry Singer? I thought I saw you?"

She nodded. She was still too overcome to answer.

"Would you be Miss Jolliffe?"

She nodded again, afraid that she would cry if she answered him aloud.

"Then, Miss, I've a message for you! Might I ask if you'd step aside a minute where we won't be overheard?"

Jane said nothing. She was quite bewildered. But her aunt saw fit to interfere.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I'm a sergeant in the Right and Tight, ma'am. I've a private message for this lady, that's all. I won't take her out of sight—just twenty paces over here, where I can speak to her alone, and not more than a minute ma'am, if you'll kindly excuse me!"

"Do you wish to speak to him, Jane?" her aunt demanded. "You seem to have some most extraordinary friends!"

"Yes! Haven't I!" she answered, finding words at last. "Oh, yes, I'll speak to him! Why not! Mayn't this lady hear? Oh, very well!"

She did not even look toward her aunt as she walked with the man who said he was a sergeant to a spot between two trees where nobody could overhear them.

"Now, don't be frightened, Miss!" said the enormous man, as he strode along beside her. "You've no earthly call to be."

"Frightened?" she answered. "Frightened?"

"Yes! Don't be frightened!"

There came the sound of a horse's feet, and she looked up, to see Colonel Cokely riding past her on his way to his quarters. He raised his hand, and she thought that he smiled behind it.

CHAPTER VII

SERGEANT EYRE CONVERSES, AND LOOKS TWICE ACROSS HIS SHOULDER

"MY NAME'S Eyre, Miss; Sergeant Eustace Eyre. I don't want to take you at a disadvantage."

"I never heard of you."

"No, Miss, I dare bet you haven't. The honor's mine. To cut a long story short, Miss, and seeing that there's some one waiting for you—when you had that talk of yours with Harry Singer in the barn at Rottingdean, I was underneath the tarpaulin you were sitting on!"

"Oh!"

"Yes, Miss, I was. And I heard a lot of what you said, and what I didn't hear my friend Sergeant Crawford did. He was hidden in the barn, too, and could hear better, not being quite so cramped as I was. We suspected Harry Singer. We'd been suspecting him for quite some time, but we didn't know anything about you—didn't even know there was such a person. All the same, we'd have done what we did do, even if we had known."

"I—I understand you of course, but——"

"Never mind, Miss. I'm coming to the rest. Please understand I'm friendly, and so's Crawford. We wouldn't either of us harm a woman if she'd let us let her alone. Now you've got to do that. You've got to let us treat you as a decent woman whom we can both of us respect."

She blushed. She was angry now, and her temper was coming to her aid.

"Now I certainly don't understand you!"

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"Oh, yes, Miss! You'll excuse me, but you do! We two men know what you're down here for, and that's no errand for a self-respecting woman. No! Now, don't cry, Miss. I'm maybe clumsy, but I'm doing the best I know how. If I thought you weren't self-respecting, I wouldn't talk to you like this. You see, Miss Jolliffe, it's like this: Crawford and I are sergeants in Colonel Cokely's regiment and, setting aside that, we'd like to see the Guzzler win that race in Paris. We'd serve him first and last through anything, even if we got no thanks for it! If you were to try to ferret out things that you've got no right to know, we'd try to stop you doing it, and we'd maybe use methods we wouldn't like to use. And if there was worse doing than just a bit of prying-out—any dirty work, I mean —we'd be rougher yet. We'd have to be."

"Dirty work? What d'you mean?"

"Well, Miss—Miss Jolliffe—Harry Singer seems to be a friend of yours, but of course I don't know what he said to you just now. He's drunk, though. You must ha' noticed that. And when he's drunk he's not over-and-above careful what he tells people. Maybe you've noticed that too. He got that letter that he mentioned in the barn, and there was a hundred pounds in it, as promised. But there were orders in it, too. D'you know what 'nobbling' means, Miss?"

She nodded. She was perfectly familiar with every kind of horse-racing phraseology.

"He had orders in that letter to nobble the Guzzler in any way he could—watch for him out at exercise, climb in through the stable-window, throw half a brick at him from behind cover when he was havin' his morning gallops—anything, in fact, so long as he stopped all chance of his running in the Grand Prix!"

"Oh! I—I can't believe that! I——"

"Crawford and I have got the letter, Miss!"

"Did he give it to you?"

"No, Miss. He got drunk, as you've seen, and read it out to us this morning, and we took it from him! We're keeping it, Crawford and I are, for the sake of argument!"

"For the sake of blackmail, I think you mean, don't you?"

Eyre looked straight into her eyes. "No, Miss Jolliffe, I don't mean that!" he answered.

She blushed again, but this time because of the conviction that his voice and manner carried.

"I beg your pardon!" she said.

"Granted, Miss! It's that little matter of getting at the horse that I want to talk to you about especially, Miss Jolliffe. Your father wasn't mentioned in that letter, and you weren't either; but there's just the chance that—that—that you——"

Eyre seemed at a loss for words, but she supplied them for him.

"That I am in some plot to hurt the horse, you mean?"

"That was what I meant, Miss. I wanted to advise you that Crawford and I are on the watch, and that we'll stay on the watch until the race—in case the horse runs," he added hurriedly. "Crawford's down there now, on guard, and we'll take turn about relieving one another. And if we were to catch anybody—a woman even —trying to hurt that horse, or even trying to get too close to him, we'd—well Miss Jolliffe, you're not the sort that a fellow likes to threaten. Will you take it as said, Miss?"

She nodded. And she stood for about a minute, poking in the dust with the point of her parasol.

"I've an idea," she said then, "that you are behaving very much after the manner of a gentleman, Sergeant Eyre! I understand that you want to caution me because of something that you overheard, and something else that you saw written in a letter. I'm much obliged to you. And now I'll tell you something. I hope you will believe me."

"I'd like to believe anything you say, Miss!"

"It's only this. I know nothing of any plan to nobble Colonel Cokely's horse, and if I did know of it I would refuse to be a party to it! Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Miss Jolliffe. I'm very glad to believe you! I sha'n't tell anybody what I know about your talk with Harry Singer, and I'll speak for Crawford. He won't either."

"Thank you, Sergeant! Is that all?"

"That's all, Miss Jolliffe, except——"

"Well?"

"I hope you're not offended!"

"I've no right to be. I feel as though I had very few rights of any kind just now, Sergeant. You've treated me very courteously indeed."

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"Good evening, Miss Jolliffe."

"Good evening, Sergeant Eyre."

He walked off one way and she the other. But they both of them looked back across their shoulders, and Eyre looked twice.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO SINGULARLY HONEST MEN INDULGE IN CONFIDENCES

THE cottage on the edge of Newmarket Heath looked strangely different since Jane Jolliffe had gone away from it. Even those few days had made a world of difference. The curtains in the windows were awry, and there was an unswept look about the place. The little path that ran up to the front door between prim rows of forget-me-nots and pyrethrum was already littered with cigar-stumps and scraps of paper, and there were muddy footprints on the white stone step.

Inside the cottage things were worse. Jolliffe himself was sitting at a breakfast-table that his daughter would have scorned to have allowed. The table-cloth was dirty, there were no flowers in the vase that occupied the middle of it and there was tobacco-ash everywhere—on the mantelpiece, the floor, the table-cloth itself even. And there was a bottle of brandy on the table, and two tumblers beside it that bore evidence of use.

Opposite to Jolliffe, with his side-whiskers bristling with discontent, sat a gray-haired man of rather more than middle age. A gladstone-bag tossed into a corner of the room bore evidence that he had not been in the cottage very long, and his whole attitude was one of being in a hurry. He sat well forward, with one elbow on the table in front of him, and drummed with his fingers on the table-cloth.

"If that's what you call playing the game with me, Pike," said Jolliffe, reaching out for the brandy-bottle, and helping himself to another stiff dose, "you need enlightenment! I've given you credit for horse-feed and expenses until I'm pretty nearly broke myself. I've sent my own daughter down to hunt up information for you, and I've consistently done my best to get your horse into condition and to keep him there. And on top of that, what do you do?"

"Bah! You've got hold of some wild-cat rumor or other. I don't know what it is! Pass the brandy!"

Jolliffe passed the brandy, but there was something more than incredulity written in his face. There was hate there, too, or something that looked extremely like it.

"Don't you believe it! This is no rumor! My daughter and I haven't always got on overwell together, but there's one thing I've got to say for her: She's always told me the exact truth. When she tells me a thing, I'd bet on it! For one thing, she's written me to say that you've been paying money every week to Tom Strivens. Now there was no earthly need to do that. That little rat Strivens'd only begin to feel his oats the minute he got hold of that much money, and besides—it wasn't the game! You owe me money, lots of it, and if you'd anything to spare, here was the place to put it. Here!"

He took out an empty wallet, laid it on the table and patted it vehemently.

"Oh, piffle! What I sent to Strivens wouldn't make an ounce of difference to you! I'd have been ashamed to offer you such a trifle on account as that."

"I can feed quite a lot of horses on five pounds a week!" said Jolliffe. The other man said nothing. He gulped half his brandy down instead.

"And then, what else did you send him?"

Pike set his glass down, and stared across the table through eyes that were a trifle bloodshot.

"How d'you mean? I wrote him a letter."

"Only one letter?"

"Two letters—maybe three. I wanted to keep him up to the mark. That horse is mine, remember. I'm more interested than you are in knowing what's likely to run against him!"

"No you're not, my friend! I've more at stake than you! So you wrote him three letters, did you. What did you tell him in the last one?"

"Oh, I forget."

"Put anything in it by any chance?"

"How d'ye mean?"

"A check for a hundred, for instance?"

Pike glared across the table at him, and growled something that was unintelligible.

"Any instructions?"

"Look here! What do you know? Out with it! I'm not going to sit here and be cross-examined by anybody."

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"I'LL out with it all right, friend Pike! It's high time that these secret little schemes of yours were stopped. You'll be getting the two of us into worse trouble than we can get out of again in a lifetime! What in thunder made you send Strivens orders—in a letter, mind—to try to nobble Guzzling Dick? In the first place, he's not the man to do it. He daren't say 'Boo!' to his own shadow. In the second place, you ought to have consulted me. In the third place, a hundred pounds was far too much to pay him. Why, you could buy ten Strivenses for a hundred pounds! Mind you, I agree that something's got to be done. But instead of helping, you've made things a lot more difficult!"

"How so?"

"Well, Strivens has given your game away for one thing, and put a lot of people on their guard! For another, my daughter, who was the best ally we could possibly have had, has been told what was in the wind. As long as I'd been able to fool her as to what my object was, I could have made use of her. Now, she's against us instead of for us! She's written me to say that she won't have another thing to do with the whole business! If she were here, I might be able to talk her round, but she's not here!"

Pike shifted in his seat uncomfortably. "I don't see what the squeamishness of your relations has got to do with me," he growled.

"It's got a lot to do with you! And so has what I say got a lot to do with you. I'll trouble to get that in your head before we go any further. I've got to the point when I don't trust you another yard, and I've had to take steps for my own protection."

"Your protection? How d'ye mean?"

"Just this. Before I wired you, I filed a lien on Tarantula. A man who would do what you've done would be perfectly capable of taking the horse away at the last minute and running him from some one else's stable. Now, you can't do it, and what's more, I've got the whip-hand! I didn't get you down here to argue with you. I sent for you to listen to what I have to say, and to make sure that you understand me."

"If I'd known what sort of ruffian you are, I'd have thought ten times before I put a good horse in your stable!" growled Pike. "As you say, you've got the whip-hand now. It won't last, but go ahead."

"Well, I don't care how you're fixed, but I stand to go broke unless Tarantula wins the Grand Prix. I betted every penny I could raise, while the odds were around the twenties, and I haven't got any money left to hedge with. Nor 've you, I imagine. If you have, hand it over, for I need it!"

"I haven't any money," growled Pike.

"I don't believe you! However, here's the point. Tarantula can win unless Guzzling Dick runs. He can win in a common canter. Unless the Guzzler runs!"

"Well? Isn't that just exactly what I was trying to arrange through Strivens?"

"Bah! Why not put a two-year-old to using dynamite. You and Strivens between you would upset any kind of cert there was. Why d'you suppose Strivens was ever warned off? Because he couldn't hold his tongue, that's why; and you want to trust him with a job like that!"

"Pass the brandy," said Pike. "Well, what's your plan?"

"If you haven't any money, borrow it. I know a man who can work this for us, but he's expensive, and he'll want his payment in advance. He'll need expense-money, and at least a hundred pounds for the job in addition—say a hundred and fifty. You've got to raise it."

"I can't."

"You must!"

"I sent the last hundred I had to Tom Strivens."

"More fool you! You've got to find another hundred and fifty right away—better make it two hundred."

"Well, supposing I can't, what then?"

"I'm going to double-cross you. I hold a lien on Tarantula, and I shall fix him so that he can't win, even if he runs at all. My credit's good and yours isn't. I can bet still on the nod, I reckon, and I'm sure you can't. And if I can't get a credit bet down on Guzzling Dick, I shall take a man I know of into my confidence, and get him to finance the thing on half-shares. I'm not going broke if I can help it."

"I knew you were a crook!" declared Pike pleasantly.

"I'm not a crook until I'm forced to be.

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You're one from choice, that's the difference! I'd rather win with Tarantula, but unless you find that money I ask for right away, I'm going to come out on the winning side some other way, that's all."

"Very well!" said Pike. "You may count on me for the cash."

"When?"

"To-day."

"Are you sure?"

"I shall have to borrow from my sister, and tell her a whole string of lies, but it won't be the first time."

"Has she got it?"

"Sure."

"Then write me out your check for it right now. I won't pay it in until after twelve o'clock. That'll give you heaps of time. There's a pen and ink."

PIKE did as Jolliffe told him, grumbling aloud and making an extremely wry face as he signed his name at the bottom of the check.

"There you are!" he said. "It's a hold-up, pure and simple, if you ask me my opinion, but I don't seem to be in a position to help myself. Now, what's your plan?"

"My plan is to get at Guzzling Dick!"

"How, when, and where?"

"That's my business. I'd trust you with a secret just about as far as I can throw your horse Tarantula! Now remember, if that check's not good, Tarantula won't win. Have you had enough to eat? Then, go and see about the money. Go and wire or do something. No, you've had enough brandy. Have all you want more when you've got that money! So long!"

"Send my bag down to the hotel for me, then," said Pike.

"Nothing of the sort! You come back here when you've got that money, and stay with me until it's time to cross over to Paris. Leave your bag where it is."

So Pike left his bag and walked out. When he was out of sight Jolliffe rang the bell. The servant-girl had left the day after Jane Jolliffe did, and it was a stable-hand who came in answer to the summons.

"Find Freddy Sharpe," he ordered. "You don't know where he is? Well, find out! Tell him I've got business for him, and say he's to hurry here as fast as he can come. Say it's urgent and important."

CHAPTER IX

COLONEL COKELY GIVES REASONS AND A RACE-HORSE LEAVES FOR FRANCE

JOLLIFFE the trainer was not good at writing letters, but there was more than one reason why he should exert himself in that direction. The chief of them was that he could not be in two places at once. Training a horse is about as exacting a business as any in the world. A man has to be on the spot, and anxious, all the time, for a thoroughbred race-horse is frequently as cranky as a spoiled child, and as delicate.

But plotting disaster to another man's horse is also a delicate business, requiring personal and cautious supervision as a rule, and he felt the need very keenly of some one on the spot at Rottingdean to send him first-hand information of the progress of his scheme. He was not fool enough to entertain the hope for so much as a single second that his daughter could be induced to be a party to the plot. But he did hope that he might still fool her. He knew that she was tender-hearted, and that she would do almost anything rather than see him bankrupt or discovered in some shady practise.

So, the morning following his conversation with Pike at Newmarket, Jane Jolliffe received a labored, long and intricately detailed letter from him that upset her. It was calculated to that end. There were pages and pages of it, beginning with a lecture on filial devotion and ending with another one. But the gist lay in the middle of it. He told her he had been scandalized to learn that Pike, the owner of Tarantula, was trying to have Guzzling Dick injured before he left for France, and he assured her over and over again that he would never be a party to such schemes.

But he pointed out—and that seemed altogether reasonable—that he could not possibly prevent such a thing happening. Neither could he very well report his knowledge to Colonel Cokely, or to Colonel Cokely's trainer, seeing that he had no proof. He was just as reasonable in declaring that if such a thing were going to happen, its importance to himself was quite rightly his chief concern, seeing how much he stood to win or lose on the Grand Prix, and that it was all-important that he should know,

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by some means or another, the exact condition of affairs.

That much was quite clear argument. Next he lied to her, and said that he had not seen Pike. That individual, he wrote, had left him in the lurch with a horse upon his hands, and he suspected that Pike was double-crossing him in some way. He wasn't sure, he said, which way, and that made matters all the more worrying. He could not afford to be associated, wrote he, even indirectly, with any rumors of foul play, and it was surely her duty, as his daughter and the only person in his confidence who was anywhere near Rottingdean, to protect him. He wound up by asking her, as a last favor to himself, to keep a sharp lookout and let him know exactly what was happening.

He then proceeded to take her compliance for granted, and to give her detailed instructions. She was to go to Rottingdean and get rooms there, and she was to watch the horse at his daily gallops, and make sure there was nothing wrong with him. She was to cross to Paris—on the same boat with the horse, if possible—and keep a sharp lookout there as well. The moment that anything untoward occurred—if the horse went lame, for instance—she was to let him know by telegram, giving all the information she could get and especially remembering to tell him who, if anybody, was suspected. The chief point was, he told her, to give him, her father, every chance to clear himself from a possible imputation of foul play.

His real idea was, of course, to get her in good humor again, and on his side. Then he intended to write her another letter, describing Freddy Sharpe as a detective in his service, and ask her to keep in touch with that individual. In that way he hoped to keep a check on Sharpe, whom he did not trust too implicitly, and to be ready to plank down a big bet in a hurry on Guzzling Dick should anything go wrong with the scheme to "nobble" him. He thought he knew of a man with money who could be induced to finance that wager in the event of its becoming necessary. He meant to win with Tarantula if he could, for that would bring him credit as well as cash. But he meant to win money on the race, even if he had to sacrifice his daughter and his reputation—such as it was—and all his prospects as a trainer.

JANE JOLLIFFE took him literally—even more so than he had intended. She was delighted at his protestations of innocence, and began to think that her firm stand before she left Newmarket had had the desired effect on him at last. And it was quite obvious to her that if Pike, or one of his tools, were caught red-handed in the act of doing some injury to Colonel Cokely's horse, Jolliffe—who was known to be Pike's trainer—would be sure to come under suspicion.

The letter that Eyre had told her was in the possession of himself and Crawford instantly flashed across her memory. If she could get that letter from them, she could send it to her father, and he could then prove easily that any plot on foot to injure Guzzling Dick was Pike's, not his! Eyre had spoken to her like an honest man, and she had no doubt that he was one. Surely an honest man, if the case were put to him clearly and in the right light, would agree to part with the letter! She made up her mind to try, at all events.

Eyre had told her that he and Crawford were standing watch at Rottingdean, so to Rottingdean she went, arriving there late that evening. She arranged for a room at the only hotel in the place, and started out at once to find Eyre, making no inquiries, for fear that people might prove inquisitive. Remembering Eyre's enormous size, she had little doubt of finding him in a little scattered village such as Rottingdean, especially since she knew where the Colonel's stables were.

It was pitch-dark when she started out to look for him. There was no moon, and what little light the stars gave seemed to be shut out completely by the shouldering downs. Up above her, the sky was visible and cloudless, but where the road wound in and out between the grass-clad hills she could scarcely see her hand when she held it out in front of her.

She had progressed about a mile, going slowly for fear of missing her way in the darkness, when she heard the sound of a horse approaching her. That was nothing that needed worry her, for Rottingdean was a place where everybody who was of any account at all would walk two miles to fetch his horse even if he only had one mile to ride when he had got him. Horses were the backbone, the one business, the one

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amusement, the all-important, always-evident obsession of the place.

BUT she drew back into a blacker shadow close beside the ditch, for fear of being seen by some one whose recognition might be inconvenient afterward. That, and the fact that a pretty girl is not always oversafe on an English lane at night, were reasons enough for concealment. The horse drew near and passed her. As it drew abreast at an easy walk its rider struck a match and lighted a cigar. He held the match in the hollow of his hands, dropping the reins on the horse's neck, and concentrating on what he was doing, for there was a trifle of wind blowing up the road. The glow was thrown back against his face and disclosed the clear-cut, unmistakable features of none other than Colonel the Honorable Kingston Cokely!

She stepped even farther back into the shadow, repressing an intense desire to walk up to him and demand the reason for his rudeness of the preceding Wednesday. He had scarcely ridden past her before she was conscious of another sound. It was another horse coming, at a walk, and this time there was a man, or else there were two men, who walked beside it. They were on her side of the road, too, close up against the ditch, and they would probably bump into her unless she moved. So she did move —right out into the middle of the road. One of her reasons for concealment at least was gone, for, with Colonel Cokely close to her, she was safe from the danger of assault.

She did not take the trouble to move silently, either, and Colonel Cokely heard her and turned his head. He drew rein and swung his horse round. A moment later he had ridden back and was leaning down to look at her. She stood like an animal at bay and faced him, giving him back stare for stare, while he very calmly took out another match and lighted it. He held it down close to her face, until she could have struck at the hand that showed smooth and pink-skinned like a woman's in the match-light. He seemed to be using every studied piece of insolence he could on purpose to annoy her.

The horse behind her, and the men who led him, stopped, and Colonel Cokely threw the match away.

"So, it's you, Miss Jolliffe, eh?" he said. His voice was not at all unkind or insolent. He seemed partly amused and partly sorry, judging by his tone.

"Have I no right on the road?" she asked him hotly. "May I not go about my own business, without being subjected to this kind of impertinence?"

"Why surely! But, why call this your own business, Miss Jolliffe? Nice little girls, with nice, fresh, honest faces, have no business touting round racing-stables, or talking to touts in barns!"

She could have killed him, for there was mockery in his voice now, mingled with a note of condescension that mortified her almost to the point of madness.

"And pretty little girls who are not nice must expect to be spoken to, and even reprimanded!"

"What d'you mean, sir!"

"I mean, Miss Jolliffe, that you either are, or you are not, a tout-ess, a—ah—tout-ine might be better. I mean, of course, a female tout. Either you are prying uninvited into my affairs, or you are not doing so. You—ah—now have the opportunity to declare yourself! I might say that when we catch a he-tout red-handed, we treat him a little roughly. Pretty little girls have no right to take advantage of the fact that they can not be whipped, and they have still less right to claim acquaintance with their victims in public places!"

"Colonel Cokely, I thought you were a gentleman! I——"

He laughed aloud. "And gentlemen, dear lady!" he answered, "are they expected to exchange greetings in public with—ah—ladies whom they have seen followed into barns by questionable characters? Possibly you don't know that I saw you the other morning—you and the man known as Harry Singer! If, on the top of that behavior, you bow to me in public, and then endeavor to corrupt my sergeants, what can you expect?"

What could she answer him? That was a far more difficult problem! Clean, decent woman's pride choked her with a sense of outrage and injustice. She wanted to cry, but knew that if she did he would pity her; and she wanted to pour out a torrent of explanation. But what girl could explain all that she had to tell under such circumstances—with two men who probably were grooms within easy hearing distance, and a man who had formed his

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opinions in advance to sit in judgment over her? Her very attitude of looking upward in order to see his face placed her at a disadvantage. She felt like a criminal before the bench!

He took her silence for admission of at least partial guilt.

"Don't you think," he said, "that a nice little girl like you, Miss Jolliffe, would be well advised to change her course considerably? Take it from me, there is nothing in the world shabbier than the seamy side of horse-racing, just as there are few things in the world finer than its brighter side. A woman, a nice woman, can lose her caste more quickly by descending to what you are doing than by any other route but one; and the one route leads into the other as a rule."

THIS was awful! He would impeach her morals next! And she was struck dumb, defenseless, by the outrageous injustice of it. Worse till—what he said was absolutely true from his point of view, from the point of view of any gentleman who did not know the exact facts of the case. And she could not defend herself without completely betraying her own father—admitting that he was mean enough to send his own daughter touting. She would spare him, and herself, that dire indignity. After all, what right had Colonel Cokely to lecture her?

"Believe me, you're wrong, Colonel Cokely," she answered him. "You're doing me injustice."

"I'm doing you the justice of believing that you might do better!" he said, gathering up his reins. "Good night, Miss Jolliffe! I see it's no use talking to you!"

He raised his cap perfunctorily and edged his horse away from her. "Bring on the Guzzler!" he called out to the men who waited in the darkness, and after that he rode on, at a walk, without another word or sign.

Somehow or other, Jane Jolliffe got the impression that he had washed his hands of her completely; condemned her by her own silence and left her to sink when fate and society saw fit. His back as he rode away was eloquent. Well, she would show him!

Two men walked past her, and a horse, that was blanketed from head to foot, shied at her and then at a mile-stone by the ditch, and sprang back across the road and almost into her. She had to jump sideways to avoid his heels. Then the darkness swallowed up horse and men, but not before she had caught sight of Colonel Cokely's monogram—black done on a white background—on a corner of the horse's blanket. So it *was* Guzzling Dick! They were stealing a march on the touts, and removing him to France by night. Funny, she thought, that his trainer was not with him. Neither of those two men was Colonel Cokely's trainer, she felt sure, and besides, the trainer would probably have been riding. And then—had not Colonel Cokely been unusually incautious in mentioning the horse by name, as she had heard him do?

TWO minutes later she had further evidence that the horse was Guzzling Dick; rather indefinite, and hypothetical, but still corroborative evidence. Another man drew near her, a man who was walking by himself, and who seemed in no sort of a hurry to overtake the procession on in front. He came quite close up to her, and stared into her face so rudely that she sprang backward.

"Don't get scared," he said. "I want to look at you, that's all."

She stepped back again, thoroughly frightened, and almost stepped into the ditch. He took advantage of her effort to recover her balance by coming up quite close and having another good hard stare straight into her eyes.

"Oh!" he said, and passed on at once without a word. He was a man of middle height, broad-shouldered and apparently possessed of quite tremendous strength, but his face was the most remarkable thing about him. It was not scarred, or apparently distorted in any way at all, and yet it was so lit up with a certain sort of cunning, a kind of brazen, impudent, semi-humorous intelligence, that anybody who had seen it once would be most unlikely to forget it. She racked her brain for a minute trying to recollect where she had seen that face before, and decided that it must have been at Newmarket. She could not recall, though, what the man's name was, or what the circumstances were under which she had ever run across him. She only felt sure in her own mind, and for reasons that she could not define, that she had heard no good of him. Somebody had at some time or another pointed him out to

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her as a dangerous character, she felt sure of that.

Was he an agent of Pike's? she wondered. But Pike did not live at Newmarket. Still—— Then she remembered. The man's name was Sharpe. She forgot his first name, but he was undoubtedly the man. It was he who had been arrested once, and had stood his trial and been acquitted, for lack of evidence, of the charge of arson, when some stables that were overheavily insured had been burned down.

Then another thought flashed through her mind. Her father had written that he was afraid Pike's deviltry might devolve in some mysterious way on him. Was this a scheme of Pike's to that end? Was this man following Guzzling Dick with the intention of doing him some injury? And had Pike chosen him from Newmarket in order to lend color to the notion, in the event of his being caught, that he was Jolliffe's agent and not his? It was more important than ever that she should get that letter incriminating Pike!

She hurried on, past the Colonel's stables. There was no one there, apparently, who watched. Past the little row of shabby cottages, where all the lights were out and in the blackness the roofs and battered palings looked like a charred spot on the hillside. On to the barn where she had had her talk with Harry Singer. They had overheard her in the barn, so perhaps they had made that their headquarters. But there was no one there either, so she retraced her steps.

She walked slowly past the cottages the second time, peering into all the deeper shadows, being possessed for some unknown reason with the idea that they might be hiding there. Then she walked still more slowly toward the Colonel's stables again, wondering whether she would have to wait about there until morning. Perhaps they had got wind already of the night departure, and were on their way to France.

But more than half-way to the stables from the row of cottages a huge form emerged suddenly from a clump of trees, and a voice that she remembered growled out "Halt!"

"Look here, Miss Jolliffe!" said Sergeant Eyre of the Right and Tight, coming to a standstill straight in front of her, "I thought I cautioned you not to come interfering round these stables!"

She almost screamed, but she checked it just in time. She remembered that an honest man, if he is an honest man, is only made angry if a woman screams at him.

"Come and sit down over here!" he said. "We'll have this out now for good and all! Crawford, this is Miss Jolliffe!"

From the darkness rose another figure, that was just as broad and just as thick, and just as well-set-up, but nearly a whole foot shorter.

"Sit down here, Miss!" he said quite pleasantly. "Three's better company than one, this time o' night, and we've something we want to say to you!"

CHAPTER X

THE HORSE DOES NOT TRAVEL UNACCOMPANIED

JANE JOLLIFFE took a seat between the two sergeants, on a log a little distance off the road, and for a minute they all three sat in silence. Then she summoned all her courage, forgot the reprimand she had received from Colonel Cokely and her injured pride, and everything except her mission.

"I want to speak first, before either of you say a word!" she said quietly.

"Go ahead, Miss!"

"Do you men know that Colonel Cokely's horse Guzzling Dick has just gone away in the direction of Brighton?"

"We do not!" said Crawford. "And what is more, Miss, I'll swear for one he hasn't!"

"So'll I!" said Eyre.

"You'd both be wrong, then! I passed Colonel Cokely twenty minutes or more ago, and spoke to him. There was a horse behind him, led by two men, and as he rode on, after speaking to me, he called out 'bring on the Guzzler.' They led that horse along after him. And listen. This is more important yet. The horse was followed, at a considerable distance, by a man named Sharpe, who I happen to know is a thoroughpaced scoundrel. He recognized me, and I recognized him."

"A middle-sized man, Miss, with square shoulders and a cunning expression on his face?"

"He smiles with one side of his mouth up and the other side straight."

"That's the man!" said Crawford. "We've been watching him! He came this

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afternoon, but we saw him go away again. He must have come back mighty suddenly!"

"There's more yet I want to tell you. I've had a letter from my father, in which he says that he's heard a rumor of a plot to nobble Guzzling Dick. He's very anxious indeed that nothing of the sort should happen, because his business relations with Mr. Pike are well-known, and if the crime were traced to Pike, my father would naturally come under suspicion."

"Then you're on our side?" said Eyre, in a voice that betrayed amazement.

"Of course I am!"

They might have continued talking for ten minutes, for their voices had changed to the tone that expressed mutual interest and presaged a conversation, but Crawford interrupted suddenly.

"Eyre!" he said, "didn't I tell you we were both —— fools? If there's anything worse than that, we're it too!"

"Why, what have we done now?"

"Done? Why, man alive! Come on, let's hurry!"

"Come on where?"

"France, you fool! Old King Cole's stolen a march on us, and here we are sitting like a brace of hens on stone eggs cackling to one another! He'll be shipping the Guzzler over via Newhaven and Dieppe. Come on. We've got to hurry if we want to catch him."

Eyre rose, unfolding himself foot by foot until he loomed up like a tree against the darkness.

"I'm ready!" he declared.

"So am I!" exclaimed Jane Jolliffe.

"You, Miss?"

They spoke both together, and they did not sound particularly pleased.

"Yes, I! My father has commissioned me to let him know by telegram the moment anything should happen to Colonel Cokely's horse. What is your business?"

"Our business is to see that nothing happens!" answered Eyre.

"Very well. I'm sure I've got more money than either of you men, or even both of you together."

"Oh, as for that, Miss——"

"And I've more than that. Can one of you run on ahead? I'm staying at the Lion and Unicorn Hotel, and they've got a trap there that can take us in to Brighton. That will save a six-mile walk. If one of you would be kind enough to go ahead and order the trap, I will pay for it—and I sha'n't have to leave my luggage behind, either! We're all on the same errand, more or less, and I'd much rather travel under your protection than alone, if you don't mind!"

Eyre turned to Crawford.

"Well?" he asked.

"I don't know why not!" said Crawford. "But, understand me, Miss, I don't want to be rude, but I scarcely know you yet, and what I do know about you is——"

"Oh, shut up!" grumbled Eyre. "She's all right. Take my word for it!"

"I'll take your word for anything!" said Crawford.

"Then, will you go on ahead?"

Crawford cleared his throat to hide a chuckle. He had never been a lady's man himself.

"All right!" he said. "I'll run on and order the trap, but mind you hurry! Shall I put your portmanteau in the trap, Miss Jolliffe?"

"Please!"

Crawford was a man of prompt action, and a moment later the sound of his running feet was dying in the distance.

"He'll never keep that pace up!" said Eyre. "But, come along, Miss—he'll not like waiting for us!"

WALKING back to Rottingdean beside a six-foot-seven-inch man, whose straight back and voice and stride and conversation created an atmosphere of nothing else but honesty, was a very different sensation from walking out from Rottingdean alone. And there was something more than just honesty, on second thoughts, about this tremendous sergeant of the Line. Non-commissioned man he might be; but the quiet authority with which he spoke, and the unassuming, untrespassing good-fellowship with which he addressed her, fell like soothing balm on her excited nerves. He was big and strong and straight and good to look at, but his point of view, if his talk was any evidence, was even better. She began to wish that the world she had been born to had been made up of men like him!

They found Crawford sitting in the trap all ready, with Miss Jolliffe's portmanteau tied safely in behind. It was Eyre who took her money and blackguarded the

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inn-keeper for one whole minute and paid her bill—less discount for extortion—and pitched her like a piece of thistle-down into the trap. But it was Crawford, the irrepressible, who took the reins and whip away from the sleepy driver and belted the horses into Brighton at a pace they had never before accomplished with a quarter of the load.

It was Crawford who leaped first from the trap at Brighton Station and rushed into the station-master's office to make inquiries, and it was he who spotted Colonel Cokely examining the directions on a horse-box. Eyre bought the tickets and, disdaining porters, tucked Jane Jolliffe's portmanteau—a hundred pounds or more—underneath his arm, and rushed her pell-mell to a waiting train, while Crawford jumped in after them.

AND it was Colonel the Honorable Kingston Cokely who stood behind a pile of baggage when the train went out and smiled shrewdly as he recognized Jane Jolliffe's face, and Eyre's and Crawford's through a carriage-window! He took the next train back to Shorncliffe. But none of the three noticed him there on the station-platform, for they were too busy congratulating themselves that the horse-box was on the train in front of them. It did not occur to them just then to wonder either whether the keen-faced individual whom Jane had recognized at Rottingdean was in the train with them. Crawford, for one, was exercised about something wholly different.

"Can you talk French, Miss?" he asked Jane suddenly.

"A little."

"Then thank the Lord for that! Eyre and I can't. We'd have been up against a proposition if you hadn't come with us!"

CHAPTER XI

DISASTER

EYRE could best have told the story himself, or Crawford, of how the three of them reached Paris, and took up quarters—Jane Jolliffe in a second-rate hotel and the two men in a room that overlooked the stable where the horse was stalled. But they would take too long about it, and enter into too much detail. The journey and its sequel were the one adventure of their lives.

They had stood, both of them, and fired over the heads of kneeling comrades at savages who outnumbered them by a dozen or more to one. And, being trained men, with their hearts in the right place, they had found it a little exciting at the time, but nothing worth discussion. They had lain prone on their bellies in the morning chill of the Himalayas and answered—shot for shot—the Afghan snipers who were helping make dawn horrible, and they had laughed and thought nothing of it.

They had seen death in a hundred forms at least; seen three-day-old battlefields where the vultures had been busy; carried dead comrades out of reach of cannibals; carried wounded men beyond the reach of native women and had watched charges of case-shot get home into a naked massed brigade. And they had watched a Gatling do its work, when the target moved and melted down and screamed.

And wounds were not unknown to them. Crawford had lain face-upward with a tulwar-cut from thigh to calf, while Eyre fought over him with rifle clubbed and the hot blood splashing from his forearms, and they had both come down the Khaibar afterward on doolees. But these things were all in the day's work, and scarcely worth passing comment.

It was Paris that amazed them. Paris, where the soldiers slopped about with leggings sewn on their trousers and both hands in their pockets! Paris, where the police wore swords, and almost every other woman that you met looked twice at you, unless she was accompanied—and then she looked three times! They had sampled Egypt and Afghanistan; they had left their marks there, and had brought their marks away; but they had never been abroad before—not really, foreignly abroad!

More things than just the French amazed them. There was the stable where the horse was stalled, for instance. It was a mile at least from any race-course! It was tucked away in the corner of a century-old courtyard, and looked more like a tool-shed than a proper place to house a thoroughbred. The only entrance to it was through an archway leading from the courtyard to the street, and they conceived it their duty to stand all day long in that entrance and watch whomever passed.

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The men who had brought the horse across channel were diligent but uncommunicative. They took no notice whatever of Eyre and Crawford, but attended to the horse, and slept above the stable. Early each morning they led him out for exercise, and once each day one of the men would mount him and let him out on the race-course for a rousing gallop. On these occasions neither of the men appeared to notice Eyre or Crawford, nor to wonder, even, why they watched so closely and followed the horse so closely through the streets.

"D'you get the cunningness of Old King Cole?" asked Crawford, two days before the race. "How's that for keeping quiet, eh? The touts are probably watching his stable all this time, and he's leading them a rare old dance, I'll bet! Still, we'll keep both eyes lifting. We tracked the Guzzler down, and if we can do it, others can! They'll nobble him yet, if we don't look out!"

SO, WITH the exception of their daily trips as far as the course and back, to watch the Guzzler exercise, they saw nothing whatever of the city that amazed them so. Jane Jolliffe did the exploring, and brought them back what news she could garner from the world outside, and she kept coming every hour or two to find out whether the horse was still unharmed. After the first day her visits began to lengthen out, and the periods in between them diminished somewhat. She and Eyre appeared to find a fund of things to talk about, and Crawford seized on those occasions to smoke his pipe alone. He swore that he enjoyed it—a lie that has possibly been forgiven him since then.

Two days before the race she came back with the information that her father had reached Paris with Tarantula.

"He's got him stabled right beside the course," she said, "and I went right up and spoke to him. He seems more than ever anxious that I should stay where I am and watch, and he says there's more reason than ever for supposing that somebody will try to use foul play!"

"Did you tell him we were here?" asked Eyre, who had formed his own opinion, quite apart from anything that Jane had told him, of Mr. Jolliffe's honesty.

"No," she said, "I didn't."

"Does he suppose you're staying here all alone, then?"

"I suppose so."

"Watching a strange stable, to try and prevent foul play?"

"Not that exactly. He wants me to bring him news the moment anything occurs."

"Um-m-m!" said Eyre, and that was all he did say. But he evidently thought a lot, and kept on thinking. For, two hours later, he referred straight back to the same subject.

"Waiting for the information, is he?" he remarked. "Well, I think he'll have to wait until the race is over!"

Eyre would probably have been right in his surmise, for he and Crawford were fully capable of standing guard, but they both contrived to overlook one most important detail. They had shaken off the man they knew as Harry Singer—left him behind in England to get as drunk as he could afford to on the little cash that they had let him keep—so they no longer had that gentleman to reckon with until the race was over. Then they could settle with him and be done with him for good and all. But they had forgotten the fact that Freddy Sharpe, against whom Jane Jolliffe had expressly warned them, was a singularly astute individual. They kept a bright lookout for him, but neglected to consider the likelihood of his hiring some one else as deputy to do his dirty work. Which, of course, was just exactly what Freddy Sharpe did do.

He waited, though, until the psychologic moment. He put off doing anything until the day before the race, when all the sporting papers had begun to give up hope of Guzzling Dick's appearance. The odds against Tarantula had shortened down to even money, for it seemed probable that he would have no competitor worthy of his form, but the bookies were still offering no more than ten to one against Guzzling Dick, for Colonel Cokely had a reputation as a maker of surprises, and his money was not known to have been wagered yet.

THE evening of the day before the race was drawing in. Eyre and Crawford, their veins tingling with excitement, were vigilantly standing guard. Everything around the stables was quiet and as it should be, when Jane Jolliffe

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returned from an exploring expedition to announce her failure to discover any sign of Colonel Cokely's arrival on the scene.

"That seems strange!" said Crawford. "I've never heard of his running a horse of his without being there to see the race. Did you try the Jockey Club?"

She told him she had not. It was the one place where she had not had nerve enough to make inquiries.

"Then I'll go myself," said Crawford.

"Why not ask the men who're looking after the horse first?" suggested Eyre, and Crawford consented.

"Sure!" said both of them together, when Crawford approached them and put his question as offhandedly as he could manage. "The Colonel's in Paris. Why?"

"Where's he staying?"

"Dunno!" they answered. And not another word could he get out of them.

"Then there's nothing for it but the Jockey Club!" said Crawford, and dashed away for a cab.

Jane went around to her hotel, and Eyre was left on guard alone. Ten minutes later still, one of the men in charge of Guzzling Dick passed out through the archway on some errand or another, and the other man went up into the loft above the stable, leaving the stable-door unguarded. That did not trouble Eyre in the least, for nobody could reach the stable except by passing him, and he watched every one who went under the archway with eyes that would have recognized an Englishman at half a glance.

WHEN three Frenchmen, dressed in overalls, walked through the arch he took no notice of them. To him they were just three jabbering foreigners, of rather more than usual size, and rather more than usually noisy. Even if he had been suspecting Frenchmen of sinister designs, it would never have occurred to him that conspirators would laugh and joke with one another as they went about their business. So they passed him unquestioned. And they reached the stable-door unquestioned too, and entered it. It was then that Eyre woke up.

He reached the stable with a rush, dashing through the doorway fifteen seconds after the last of the three men had disappeared through it.

He was greeted by the sound of plunging, and stamping, and by something else. A fist shot out, and landed straight between his eyes with a force that would have sent most men to the land of dreams. It only served to arouse Eyre's dander.

He let out blindly, for the blow had dazed him, and he could not see his assailant. But he hit something, and whatever it was he hit went down in front of him like a log.

When his brain cleared, he saw one of the three men in overalls standing bent forward like a blacksmith, with Guzzling Dick's near hind leg held tight between his knees. The third man held a mallet and, as Eyre looked, he brought it down with a crack on the horse's fetlock.

Pandemonium followed. The man who held the horse's leg let go. The horse lashed out with both hind legs like a charge of dynamite, and Eyre rushed in. The third Frenchman was down on the floor, spluttering still, and trying to regain his wind, but the other two were very much alive, and they met Eyre's rush half-way, with a savage fury that almost took him off his guard.

He seized one by the throat and the other by the waist, and bore both of them to the ground.

A fight ensued that beggared description —with a savage horse lashing out frantically within a foot of Eyre's head.

The noise was terrific. They yelled, and Eyre cursed, and the injured horse did his best to kick the stable into splinters. Suddenly, when Eyre's grip on one French man's throat had almost throttled him, and a rain of blows from the second Frenchman's fist had brought the blood streaming down Eyre's face, the third Frenchman recovered his wind sufficiently to rise. For half a second he stood looking at the mêlée, then he sprang in and aimed a savage kick at the Sergeant, which landed on the back of his head and put him out of action.

Instantly the other two sprang up and kicked him. They would have killed him, probably, had not the stableman who should have been on guard come rushing down the stairway with only half his clothes on and shouted an alarm.

The Frenchmen had scarcely turned to meet him when two gendarmes made their appearance in the doorway and arrested everybody!

The stableman who had gone off on an

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errand returned just at that minute, and since he had evidently had nothing to do with the actual fighting, the gendarmes left him in charge of the horse. An ambulance was brought, and Eyre was thrown in it and driven off. But the three Frenchmen and one groom were marched away in handcuffs. Behind them, and talking to the Frenchmen volubly in Gascon French, there walked a square-shouldered man of middle height, and evidently prodigious strength, whom they addressed from time to time as M'sieu Sharpe. He had turned up when the fighting was all over, but he seemed to take an all-absorbing interest in it.

ONE hour later Eyre had sufficiently recovered from the kick to have explained to him by a police official that he stood charged with the offense of criminally injuring a horse, and endeavoring to kill the three men who had tried to prevent him doing it. The information was given him through the medium of an interpreter, who, however, declined pointblank to translate his indignant explanation of the facts. He was told that he would be brought before an examining magistrate next morning.

At that selfsame minute Crawford returned from a fruitless search for Colonel Cokely, to find one lone stableman engaged, with a bucket of water and a sponge, in attending to a swollen fetlock that quite evidently would prevent the horse from running on the morrow in spite of all his efforts.

"What's happened?" demanded Crawford in an awestruck voice.

The stableman looked up at him and scowled.

"Get out o' here!" he snarled. "So that was what you were hanging round here for, was it—you and your ten-foot friend! You dirty, low-down scum of a stable-sneak! Get out o' here quick, or I'll have you arrested like the other one!"

"Arrested? What d'you mean?"

"Get out o' here, I said!"

The stableman dropped his sponge and walked toward the door, with the evident intention of summoning assistance, so Crawford thought discretion best. He stood outside the door, and asked him further questions, but could get nothing out of him beyond a string of choicely worded threats. So he left him, and went round to find Miss Jolliffe. He knew of no other way of obtaining information. She could talk French, at least.

CHAPTER XII

COLONEL COKELY CONTRIVES

"I DON'T see what we can do, Miss Jolliffe," said Crawford dismally, on the morning following. "The best thing we can do is to go and see the race. We may as well get that much satisfaction!"

"I don't even like to pretend to enjoy myself," she answered, "while poor Sergeant Eyre's in jail on a false charge!"

"All the same," said Crawford, "he'll like to hear about the race when he gets out, and he'll like to hear about it at first-hand, too!"

They were tired and sleepy, both of them. They had spent the whole night and half the morning in rushing round Paris in a vain endeavor to secure the unlucky Eyre's release, and they had failed, whichever way they turned. They had tried the police station first, and had not even been allowed to see him, or send a message to him. In fact, it was only after an almost interminable search that they had discovered, even, which station it was where he was confined.

Next, they had tried the Consulate, to find it closed. When they had returned there in the morning and had explained their mission, they had been rebuffed. They had even been to the British Embassy, and an official there had told them that it was not the policy of the British Government to interfere on behalf of lawbreakers. If Sergeant Eyre was guilty, he would undoubtedly be punished in accordance with the law of France; and if he were not guilty, he would be released. The official refused even to send a message through to Eyre.

Jane Jolliffe had gone in search of her father, and had told him of the horse's injury. He had feigned distress at the news, but she had had no difficulty in detecting an undertone of exultation in his voice. A moment later she had heard him, in the next room, telephoning to somebody or other, whose name she could not catch, to bet heavily on Tarantula. She had insisted on his coming at once to Eyre's assistance, but he had refused her firmly. He affected to be shocked at the idea of attempting to

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help a man who would injure some one else's horse.

"Let him rot in jail!" he said. "The low-down blackguard!"

Jane had spoken up for Eyre, and had asserted her absolute knowledge that he was falsely charged, but her father had laughed at her cynically. He told her to "go and tell that story to the Horse Marines," and seemed so jubilant, and so determined to believe in Eyre's roguery, that Jane lost her temper.

"You've never even met the man!" she told him.

"And I never even want to meet him!" he answered her.

In the end they quarreled seriously, for his joy at the injury to Guzzling Dick was much too evident, in spite of his efforts to conceal it, and she became convinced that it was her father, and none other, who was at the bottom of the whole business.

She had sought him out again in the morning, though, to make a final effort to induce him to come to Eyre's assistance, and she found him on the race-course. He pointed out Colonel Cokely to her. She saw only his back, as he disappeared through a gate leading off the course, but her father told her gleefully that he "never saw a Johnny look so glum in all his life!"

And he refused more peremptorily than ever to have anything to do with Eyre.

"You say he's one of Cokely's men?" he asked her. "Then let Cokely help him!"

And that was the last conversation that she ever had with her father.

SHE went off at once, to try to overtake the Colonel, but he had disappeared already in the crowd outside the course.

"Let's go to the race," said Crawford. "If it don't do Eyre any good, it won't hurt him and there's just the chance that we may run up against the Colonel there. If we do, I'll speak to him, whoever he's with! He's not fond of watching races, though, unless a horse of his own is running. I don't mind betting that he's gone straight back to England, and left the horse to follow him. And by the by, Miss Jolliffe, talking of England—have you got any money? Mine's all gone—what with cab-fares and one-thing and another. You see, Eyre and I betted pretty close to every penny we could raise on Guzzling Dick, and didn't leave ourselves much more than enough for our return-fares. We counted on the Guzzler's winning! If I happen to see an English bookie on the course I can get a little bet down on Tarantula on credit, and raise money that way—otherwise I'm broke, and so's Eyre."

"I've got about ten pounds!" she told him.

"Um-m-m! That's scarcely enough for you—let alone us two! D'you think your father might——"

"As long as I live," she said firmly, "I'll never touch another penny of his money! It's all dirty money! He doesn't get it honestly!"

Crawford whistled.

"Well, never mind, Miss Jolliffe!" he said, with an attempt to appear cheerful. "Maybe we'll meet the Colonel, and anyhow we're not right up against it yet. There's maybe worse to come!"

THEY reached the course ten minutes before the time set for the first race, and were too busy working their way through the surging crowd to have time either to see the race or find an English bookie who might know Crawford or even look for the Colonel. In the interval between the first race and the second they could only realize the practical impossibility of finding any one they wanted in that throng.

Jane Jolliffe was for buying tickets for the Paddock, but Crawford pointed out to her the need for economy in the present state of her finances.

"Keep your money!" he advised her. "Let's get opposite the grand stand, and keep a bright lookout for him. Then if we see him, let's buy one ticket, and I'll go in and speak to him. What's the use of throwing money away until we know he's there?"

The Grand Prix was the fourth race of the day. While the second and the third races were being run, they pressed up against the railing opposite the grand stand and strained their eyes to catch a glimpse of the only man in France who could save the situation for them. Once Jane thought she caught sight of him, but the man she pointed out to Crawford turned out to be some one else, and their hearts went down again with a flop.

Then the numbers went up for the Grand

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Prix, and the course and the crowd became a bedlam of shouting maniacs all striving for a good position from which to view the race. There was still no sign of Colonel Cokely anywhere. He had probably gone home.

The course was cleared by mounted gendarmes, and a sudden silence fell on the scrambling crowd, as one by one the horses filed out on the course—led by Tarantula, curveting and prancing as though he felt fit for the one race of his life.

"Six to one!" yelled an English bookie in the crowd. "Six to one, Tarantula!"

"How's that?" asked Crawford. "He was evens yesterday!"

Suddenly he gripped Jane Jolliffe's arm with a strength that made her squeal.

"Look! Look, Miss! Those are Colonel Cokely's colors!"

"Four to one, Guzzling Dick!" yelled the bookie. "Fours the Guzzler!"

There was a rush to bet with him, and somebody on the grand stand flashed him a signal.

"Three to one Guzzling Dick!" he shouted.

Crawford and Jane Jolliffe turned and stared at one another. Were they mad, or dreaming, or had a miracle happened?

They had last seen Guzzling Dick in a dark courtyard-stable more than a mile away, with a swelling on his fetlock like a water-bottle, and his near hind leg raised off the ground because he could not bear the pain of lowering it. And here—glossy as brown satin, prancing and snatching at his bit like a steam-fed devil, and with all four legs in perfect working order—came the self-same Guzzler, bearing an English jockey on his back who wore the green and gold and gray of Colonel Cokely!

"And there's the Colonel!" exclaimed Crawford. "There he is—see!"

It was none other than the Colonel. There was not a doubt of it. He was standing against the paddock-railings, watching each of the thirteen horses file out onto the course, and smiling the grim smile that his Regiment knew so well.

"You'll excuse me, Miss," said Crawford, "but I'll be —— if I understand it!"

HE UNDERSTOOD the race, though. There was no mistaking any part of it, or Guzzling Dick's share in it, either! The Guzzler got away in front, and streaked ahead until he led the field by ten good lengths. And there he stayed, with the rest—Tarantula included—galloping their hearts out in a vain effort to reduce his lead. He flashed past the winning post alone, and Colonel Cokely came down to the paddock-gate himself to lead him in.

"Come on, Miss!" said Crawford, seizing Jane Jolliffe's arm, as the crowd surged out onto the course again. "Let's go and catch him before he gets away!"

"Eyre and I have won seven hundred pounds between us!" he told her as they ran.

CHAPTER XIII

JANE JOLLIFFE FINDS HERSELF NOT ALTOGETHER UNPROTECTED

AN APPLICATION to the Embassy, when made by Colonel the Honorable Kingston Cokely, was rather different, it seemed, from one having exactly the same end in view when made by Sergeant Crawford. The Colonel took his time, though, before he made it. There was the horse to be seen to first—the real Guzzling Dick—and the other horse that had masqueraded as the Guzzler, to such good purpose!

He saw them both into their horse-boxes and off on their way to England before he found time for other matters.

In the meantime Crawford went to the police station and waited for him there, on his instructions. Miss Jolliffe sat with him, refusing pointblank to return to her hotel until she knew for certain that Sergeant Eyre had been released from durance vile. She remained seated when Colonel Cokely at last stalked in, accompanied by some one from the Embassy, and though each saw the other, neither bowed.

Five minutes later, Eyre was produced with his head in bandages, and looking more like a bespoiled mummy than a British sergeant. His size was almost all that had been left of him apparently. Crawford swore lustily at the sight of him, and Jane Jolliffe ground her teeth.

"I would like to say," said Colonel Cokely, "that this man bears a most exemplary character. He has been twelve years in my Regiment, and I know all about him. Has he been before a magistrate?"

"Not yet, sir," said the police official.

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"He was not considered well enough to be arraigned."

"Ah! Well, there are certain matters that I would like to inquire into in your presence. Possibly you have a competent interpreter available? You can then satisfy yourself whether it is worth your while to proceed against him, and I can decide whether to take his part or not."

The police official agreed readily enough to that, having a positive yearning to see justice done, since the Embassy seemed interested.

"You spoke of a letter?" said the Colonel, turning to Sergeant Crawford. "Produce it!"

Crawford produced the orders that Pike had sent to Harry Singer, instructing him to "nobble" Guzzling Dick. The only word in that that needed interpretation was "nobble," and Colonel Cokely had to manage it. The official interpreter did not have the word in his vocabulary.

"Now, tell your version of the story," he ordered Eyre.

Eyre did so, in about fifty words. He cut it short for several reasons, not least of which was the fact that his mouth was almost out of action as a result of the Frenchman's hammering.

"What possessed you to come to Paris at all?" asked Cokely.

"Wanted to see you get fair play, sir!" he mumbled through unwilling lips.

Colonel Cokely coughed. "Quite quixotic of you!" he remarked.

"No, sir! Not altogether!"

"Ah! Well, you see how it is," he said to the police official. "This letter proves that these two men became aware of a plot to injure a horse of mine. At about the same time, and from a different source, I became aware of the same thing. I keep my affairs to myself, as a rule, and without telling any one except my trainer and two grooms whom I could trust, I sent another horse, that looked very much like Guzzling Dick, across to Paris. I had him labeled Guzzling Dick, and had my name written on the label, in the hope that the —ah—criminals would mistake him for the real one, as it seems they did.

"These two men, however, made the same mistake. They seem to have been anxious to prevent any such thing happening, and they followed the horse to keep an eye on him. The horse was injured, and this man Eyre seems to have caught the men who did it in the act, and there you are!"

"But are you certain," asked the policeman, "that these soldiers were not interested in having the horse hurt? Can they prove the contrary?"

The Colonel turned on Crawford again.

"Have you won any money on the race?" he asked.

"About seven hundred pounds, sir!"

"At starting price?"

"No, sir. We sent the money to Flushing, at a quoted price."

"Have you the receipt for it?"

Crawford dived into his pocket and produced a printed slip.

"There you are, sir," he said.

The Colonel took the slip and handed it to the policeman without so much as looking at it.

"That ought to make things clear," he said.

And the policeman admitted that it did, for surely no two men would attempt to injure a horse on which they believed they stood to win a sum of seven hundred pounds!

"Can you take him before a magistrate at once?" asked the Colonel. "I'd like to have his case dismissed as soon as possible. He's due to be back on duty to-morrow afternoon!"

"I believe so," the official answered, and he sent a messenger to make absolutely sure that the magistrate was sitting.

"In the meantime," said the colonel, "if you'll allow me, I would like to have a little talk with Eyre."

THE policeman allowed him to take Eyre to one side where he could not be overheard, and the giant stood in front of him as meekly as a child, and quite evidently wondering.

"Now, understand me, Sergeant!" the Colonel said. "I have no intention of interfering in any way with your rights. If you want to go ahead—why, go ahead! The law in France is very strict in cases of assault, and you can have these men severely punished if you wish. But—and let me remind you again that you can do exactly as you wish—if you prosecute those men, you will have to drag in both Pike and Jolliffe—and, if you drag them in, I fail to see how you can keep Jolliffe's daughter out of it!

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"The greatest sufferer in this case is myself. I've been put to considerable expense and inconvenience, and I have lost the services, and the life perhaps, of a valuable horse. But the Guzzler won the race, and I am satisfied. So should you be satisfied. You've won a lot of money. Pike and Jolliffe have both of them bolted. I purposely gave them time to bolt before I came here. They are ruined financially, and I will take good care that neither of them ever trains a horse or enters a horse in a race again. They won't even dare to show up in England again. I would have prosecuted them, for I have evidence enough, but I've an idea that Miss Jolliffe there——"

"Enough said, sir!" said Eyre saluting.

"Then would you like me to tell the magistrate that you would rather not press a charge against these three men? They will go to jail, of course, for assaulting you—but only for short sentences I expect."

"Anything you say, sir."

"Very good, then, Sergeant. One other thing. You will remember that I made no request for your services as watchmen! I prefer to manage my own affairs in my own way, and I like that fact remembered! However—and this, mind you, is not a precedent—I will pay for your services on this occasion, and you and Crawford will receive a hundred pounds apiece as soon as I can get a check cashed. But next time that you interfere without being invited, I shall let you stay in jail! Do you understand me?"

HE STARTED to leave the office, but turned back again and bowed to Jane Jolliffe. She rose, a little awkwardly, and evidently wondering whether to acknowledge his bow or not.

"I don't like to be severe, Miss Jolliffe," he assured her, "but perhaps, now, you will realize exactly what I meant when I warned you against the seamy side of racing! Your father, I am credibly informed, has bolted across the Belgian border, or in that direction, and he is scarcely likely to revisit England. I hope you are not completely stranded?"

She blushed to the roots of her hair, but did not answer him.

"I—ah—mean that in a certain sense the—ah—fact that my horse won that race may have contributed to your—ah—present predicament. Please don't allow yourself to feel—ah—stranded. I should be honored if you would—ah—allow me to place funds at your disposal!"

Still she did not answer him. She could not. She was overwhelmed by a dozen conflicting sensations, not the least of which was hatred of the man who had snubbed her in public. Only, he *would* not give her a chance to get back at him!

Eyre answered for her. He stepped up, saluted and stood at the salute until the Colonel chose to notice him.

"Well?" asked the Colonel.

"Under favor, sir——"

"Go ahead!"

"I'll be responsible for her, sir!"

"Dear me! That must be a tremendous relief to the young lady! Since when have you been her guardian?"

Eyre did not answer him, and he turned to Jane.

"Is there anything between you two?" he asked.

"I—I don't understand you!"

"Well, 'pon my soul! It seems we're all in the dark! Here, Crawford! Come over here!"

And Crawford came.

"Do you know anything about this?"

"About what, sir?"

"About these two?"

Crawford grinned. "Not I, sir!" he answered.

"Will somebody enlighten me?" he asked. "You, Miss Jolliffe! Will you kindly answer me?"

"With reference to what?"

"Are you engaged to this man, or anything—are you going to marry him?"

"He hasn't even asked me!" she replied.

"It seems I'm all at sea!" said the Colonel, turning to go away. "My apologies, if I've put my foot in it!"

"Just a little previous, sir, that's all!" said Crawford in an undertone, following the Colonel quickly though at a respectful distance, and leaving Eustace Eyre and Jane together.

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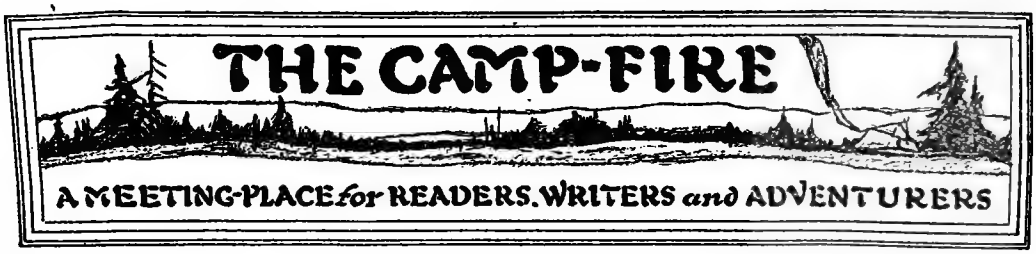

IN THE Camp-Fire two months ago, in connection with Donald Francis McGrew's "The Wail of the Pogaree," I quoted Mr. McGrew long enough to indicate that legends of the Silver Creese are very real and living matters in the Philippines. You may chance to recall how the old dato, half mad with grief for his son, fashioned the jeweled Silver Creese and with it defied the God he had previously worshiped, how he never came back from the mountain and how the Silver Creese went on to other adventures, always bloody. And I wouldn't tell any more than that because Mr. McGrew was writing the stories of these adventures.

Well, "Two and the Silver Creese" in this number is one of the stories about the Creese, except that it isn't, and the following letter from Mr. McGrew adds to its interest:

It is a true story, save that it was a string of pearls instead of the Creese, and was told me by the same priest who related others you have read.

I wish you could have spent a few evenings with that priest and me. Once in a while, when the moon was very soft, and the shapes of memory had fast hold of him, he would call me "My boy of the long ago." I never could get him to tell me *that* story; it always made me feel peculiar, anyhow, when he said that. But I liked the old fellow fine, and I have him to thank for many evenings of pleasant talk, as well as a great many other things a man gains by coming in contact with a gentleman and a scholar.

NOW as to "The Winner," in this issue: Mr. Townend tells me that something very, very like that happened in Belfast a few years ago, when two sergeants fought for the middleweight championship of the regiment.

AS AN *insurrecto* in Mexico, newspaper reporter in Los Angeles, cow-puncher in the San Luis Obispo country, actor in San Francisco, real-estate salesman in Sacramento, etc., Fred V. Williams has, for twenty-five years of age, had his share of exciting times and expects to have a good deal more before he is through with this old world. Some day we'll have the highly amusing tale of "The Commandeered Barber," a reminiscence of *insurrecto* days, which he has contributed for the amusement of the rest of the Camp-Fire. Meanwhile we have in this issue "The Cost of the Battle-Lust." Follows the letter with which the story was first submitted to the magazine:

Los Angeles, Cal.

Enclosed please find "The Cost of the Battle-Lust," a story founded upon the actual experiences of the author in Mexico during the retreat of the shattered insurrecto army at the battle of Tia Juana, June 22, 1911, after three hours of fighting against overwhelming odds.

This army was in the command of General ——, a soldier of fortune under five flags, and on whose staff at this and other engagements I had the honor of serving. The "army" comprised 150 Americans, all of them adventurers and fighting purely for the "fun of the thing."

At the battle of Tia Juana these Americans, terming themselves insurrectos, marched out and fought 1500 federal soldiers under Governor Vega of Ensenada, Lower California. We left more than one-third of our number on the field. The enemy lost approximately 250 men. The battle was fought twenty-two miles from San Diego, California. Our wounded, numbering forty, were butchered to a man.

I am a newspaper reporter in this city, and at the time had penetrated the war-zone and joined the rebel army for a story. The description of this retreat and the pleadings of the wounded that they be carried away to escape massacre have never been printed before. I never got a chance to hand in my last story to my paper from the field, because I was jailed with the rest of the fugitive army and penned in the military prison at Fort Rosecrans for five days.

This was the last battle of the revolution of 1911. We had been fighting for Madero against Diaz, but on Madero's ascension to the presidency we promptly raised the standard of Ricardo Flores Magon, a man whom most of us had never heard of before, but who is now serving eleven months in the U. S. prison on McNeil's Island for violation of neutrality laws as a direct result of our enthusiasm for him.

General —— is serving three years as a result of his Mexican experiment.

Sincerely,

FRED V. WILLIAMS.

P. S.—Lower California was held by these Americans for three months against the combined forces

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of the Government. It was only after the close of the revolution in the east that the Government was enabled to concentrate its attention on us, which ended in our defeat. Machine guns did it.

THOUGH it was finished nearly a year ago, we still get constant demands for back numbers of ADVENTURE containing Honoré Willsie's "Kut-le of the Desert." Our stock of the July, 1912, issue is entirely exhausted. Frederick A. Stokes Company, 443 Fourth Avenue, New York City, will bring the story out in book form early this Fall under the title "The Heart of the Desert," and all future inquiries should be addressed to them.

HERE is the letter that accompanied Ledward Rawlinson's story in this issue when he first submitted it to us:

Herewith "Plunkey, Troubadour," another story of Bolivia, which I hope you will like. I could sign an affidavit to about ninety per cent. of the story.

Everybody got drunk the day they buried Plunkey, for no one realized his worth until after he was gone. That night at dinner a number of exiles stood up in the dining-room of the Hotel Guibert and drank a toast to his departed spirit. It was one of the most solemn yet ridiculous things I have ever witnessed.

LONG ago I meant to explain, to those who noticed a letter from H. Bedford Jones in a previous "Camp-Fire," that Soange-taha found Man-Who-Makes-No-Shadow again, on a "lost forty acres" up in Michigan. Mr. Jones blew into the office one day and told me about it, he being the former gentleman. Those who didn't notice needn't worry.

BORN in Ireland, an orphan at eleven and without a single relative, selling papers on London streets, printer's devil, milk-seller, cabin-boy. This much and what follows I learned about Edgar Wallace —whose "Carfew Deals in Riffs" is in this issue—by means of a letter he sent me from England, saying, "I send you some stuff which has been written about me. I neither indorse nor deny anything which is in it! Except the main facts are fairly accurate."

At fourteen he had been half-way round the world; at sixteen was keeping time for a contractor at four a week. At seventeen he joined the British army and served his country for six years in the infantry and on the medical staff.

Probably no English writer knows as much about "Tommy Atkins" as Edgar Wallace, and no writer save Kipling is as well known to the British soldier as the author of "Smithy," a book which enjoyed a phenomenal sale in 1905.

With his corps to South Africa in 1896; Mashonaland Rebellion; Benin Expedition.

It was while Wallace was in South Africa that his work—he was writing poetry for the local papers—attracted the attention of Rudyard Kipling, who was on a visit to the Cape. Kipling asked the young soldier to dine, and gave him a memorable piece of advice:

"Your stuff is all right. What you want now is a little spit and polish."

Of his rapid rise as war correspondent, editor, writer, poet, special correspondent, his love for racing and sport generally, his wanderings and other things, there will be more later. For there will be more stories by Mr. Wallace.

Incidentally, William Jennings Bryan is the godfather of his son, Bryan Wallace.

YOU will remember that at the March Camp-Fire L. Warburton gave us, under title of "The Back-of-Beyond," a vivid description of the almost unknown interior of his native land, Australia. So that now you will all the more enjoy his story in this issue, "Through the 'Never-Never' Land." Which, by the way, is practically a narrative of actual fact, as you will see by the following letter from Mr. Warburton:

Herewith a yarn of the Australian bush. Of course it is not entirely fact, but it is based on the experiences of a man who died about two years back. His name was R. T. Price-Maurice.

Maurice was a man of about forty years of age when I met him first. I had just returned to South Australia from Africa, and was sick of wandering. I had a kink in my nut that it was up to me to go to work again, but I couldn't find it. I met Maurice one night and, after some interesting talk, he showed me his armory.

It was the first time I had seen an automatic pistol, and I was greatly interested in his opinions of the efficacy of certain weapons for stopping men. I opined that a Lee-Enfield nickel bullet was as good as the best soft-lead plug, if you broke the nickel away from the nose and gave it a chance to expand. Maurice had the same opinion, but held it didn't apply to his automatic, which fired nickel-shelled bullets so darned quick that he could enlarge a hole to the size an expanding bullet would make, in time to stop any man living. Then I had his own version of the shooting of the Afghan.

I knew there had been trouble over the incident, and the wealthy countrymen of the man who was killed by Maurice in the bush, away from civilization, insisted on the most strict inquiry. Maurice

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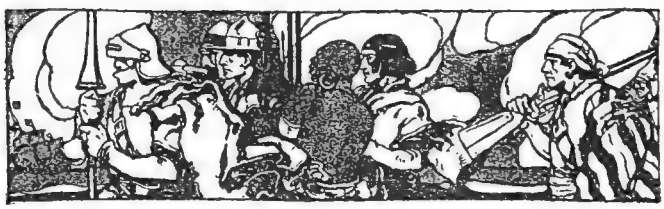
pleaded self-defense and custom of the bush, and, as no jury would have convicted him of manslaughter, the State did not prosecute.

Maurice was a wealthy man, owning a couple of stations and drawing an income of about four thousand a year, but he was never happy unless in the bush. For the comforts and luxuries of a city he had no time. He had been well-educated; had traveled all over the world, and at the time I met him was satisfied there was no place for adventure like the vast interior. He had made a number of exploring trips of considerable value to the State, entirely at his own expense, and the love of the life was in his blood.

A week after I first met him he paid me the compliment of asking me to go with him. It was a compliment, because he generally took out only his black-boy and a camel-driver. I was thinking of it when I received an appointment in Western Australia and accepted it with the idea of making a respectable start toward "settling down." Maurice went out over the track I have selected for my story, and had a terrible time getting through. That trip and the Afghan shooting I have linked up and thrown back into the earlier stages of Maurice's life.

LAST month I asked what you thought of a department to serve as a clearing-house for adventures and adventurers. Before what I had written could reach your eyes we received so many inquiries along this line that my question seemed answered by you in advance, and we open the department with this issue.

And at present writing I'm awaiting your opinions on the suggested department of "Lost Trails" for learning the whereabouts of comrades of other days, and on the plan for identification cards as set forth last month.



WANTED —MEN *and* ADVENTURES

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to such of our readers as may care to avail themselves of it. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or part of a letter. Any inquiry for adventures or adventurers sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor.

CAN any one use a man with the following qualifications? Has been a sailor and knows a bit of navigation; served in one navy and two armies; worked as painter, cow-puncher, real-estate salesman, engineer; considered fairly good with a machine-gun. "I am open for anything with a chance for action and a little of the 'yellow.'" (Has tried Mexican army and prefers something else.) Very truly yours, (No. 1.) L. BUSHNELL, Hotel Sonora, Cananea, Sonoro, Mexico, Lock Box 323.

WANTS to know of any railroad or other work or expeditions that are going on or will start soon. "I've been knocking around South America for about six years now and I'm about sick of it. Been to North Africa and around the Mediterranean some." Very truly yours, No. 2.

THE interesting letter from No. 3 our legal advisors decided could not be used, at least till we had definite details. Quite a big expedition, promising plenty of adventure for all those adventurers who would throw in their lot with the enterprise. Of course it may very well be quite legitimate, but it looked too much like a filibustering enterprise. ADVENTURE does not undertake to assist in violating the laws of our country. If you recruit through this department you must satisfy us of the legality of your intentions. No. 3's name will not be given and no letters to him will be forwarded.

ANY one need a "reliable, healthy and strong man"? Three years in U. S. army—one in Island of Jolo, P. I. Honorably discharged. Prospected, mined and trapped from Arizona to Canada; punched cattle; stoked on ocean liners. In Mexico and along the border when trouble broke out. "Would like employment where there is something doing." Very truly yours, No. 4.

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"IN THE 'Camp-Fire' for February I find 'The only claim a man need advance for a seat with us is his desire to take it.' May I change that to read 'man or boy'?"

Knows Spanish, something of telegraphy, gliding-machines, auto-repairing and wireless. "If you can dig up an adventure for me, please let me know. Only conditions are a sporting chance of getting back, and carfare, if more than 500 miles from Newark, N. J." Very truly yours, No. 5.

"MAYBE you know of some one else that is 'adventuring' and who would like to have a young fellow of middle weight, nearly 6 feet tall, good draftsman, mechanic, swimmer, electrical worker, and having worked at construction and erection of electric signs. And if on an adventure of the "Amazon Charlie" kind, would also state that I am a fair marksman with rifle, shotgun or revolver, having at the age of about 15½ years made a record of 42 out of 50, with a high-power army rifle, at 100 feet. I would like very much to join some adventure party on a daring course. I here extend my services to the adventurers of the Camp-Fire, if taken before Summer. For I have prospects of an adventure on the Pacific coast some time after June, maybe.

Very truly yours, No. 6.

"AT THE latter end of the Boer War I left home and enlisted in the Imperial Bushmen, at Randwich, New South Wales. On my return I shipped on the British steamer *Heathbank* as A. B. and jumped ship at Sourabaya, Java. I then went to Batavia, or Tan Jong Priok as the harbor is called, and stayed there long enough to know every one from the Malay policemen individually to the fat 'Haven Meister,' Java being a Dutch colony.

"I then went to Singapore, Straits Settlements, and became a member of the Tan Jong Pagar Dock Co. The next two years I wandered through Siam, Johore, India, Burmah, and the beginning of the Russo-Jap mix-up found me in Canton, China, as Customs inspector. Shameen, Hong-Kong, Macao, Shanghai, and Vladivostok finished me, with the exception of Kobe, Nagasaki and Tokyo, in the East.

"I packed a transit for a surveyor's outfit in British Columbia; drove a grocery wagon in Medicine Hat; herded sheep through Wyoming; fired a locomotive on several different railroads; broke cavalry horses for the U. S. Government at 'old Fort Reno,' Oklahoma, of 'Flaming Arrow' fame; been on the tramp through Old Mexico; sweated in the 'fidley' of tramp steamers; broke the Mexican fishing laws off Campeche banks. I've registered in St. Regis, New York, on one side of this old planet, and wrapped the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* round me for protection on the old 'Domain' in Sydney, N. S. W., Australia, and still hope to see quite a lot more yet.

"I've not heard a whisper from home for over ten years and would like to hear from some one from Australia. I sure would like to have gotten a chance to go on that trip with Mr. Lange, but I guess he could not begin to take every one who wrote, and I sincerely wish him success in the venture. If I hear of a similar venture in that direction this Spring, I intend to try for a place. So if you know of any one who can use a husky young fellow who can throw a diamond hitch or heave on a brace, I'm his man. Very truly yours, No. 7.

TWENTY years old; of German parents; born in Ohio. Has the *Wanderlust* and wishes to communicate with "some one who can prescribe for me." Very truly yours, No. 8.

HERE is a letter that must be given in full. The story of a man's life does not often make more interesting reading than does this condensed biography. And he wants to get in touch with "some one who could use my services with advantage to us both":

I was born in New York City, of New England stock, in 1875, but my parents moved to South Carolina when I was quite a youngster. When I was about sixteen years of age my father died and we returned to New York, where I entered an office. I left them in 1895 and proceeded to South Africa, eventually drifting to the town of Buluwayo, Rhodesia. Here I enlisted in the Matabele Mounted Police. Shortly after my enlistment I took part in what is now the famous Jameson Raid. I was captured by the Boers at Doornkop with many others and in due time was sent to England, where the officers were tried and some of them received sentences of imprisonment.

I returned to South Africa in March of 1896 and on arrival at Cape Town we found that the Matabeles, taking advantage of the absence of the Matabele Mounted Police, had risen in rebellion and massacred many of the settlers. I at once proceeded to Mafeking (afterward to become famous) and joined the Relief Force which was being raised there. I was attached to Coope's Scouts and saw service with them throughout that campaign, on the completion of which I went back to New York.

A few months later found me again in England. At this time the war between Greece and Turkey broke out and I joined the Foreign Legion, which was then being raised in London, and was sent to Athens and then up to the front. After the battle of Pharsala and the defeat of the Greeks I proceeded back to London and took part in Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee with the Rhodesian Forces. The following month I again returned to New York and proceeded West with the intention of going to the Klondike, but on arrival at Vancouver I heard such hard-luck stories of the North that I returned East after a short stay in several of the Western cities.

AFTER a short time at home I again proceeded to South Africa and at once went to Buluwayo, where I obtained the position of Asst. Secretary to the Club. I held this place for a short time and then went to Fort Salisbury, where I was appointed Detective Sergeant of Police. While holding this appointment I had several exciting encounters with gun-runners on the Portuguese African borders and traveled all over Central and East Africa.

About this time I received a cable from home and was forced to resign and return to New York on private affairs. I stayed in that city until September of 1899, when I went back again to South

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Africa, arriving there about three weeks after the outbreak of the Boer War. I at once enlisted in the South African Light Horse as a trooper. I was promoted to the rank of regt. quartermaster-sergeant within nine days, and on the relief of Ladysmith I received my commission as lieutenant. Four months later I was given the rank of captain, with a Staff appointment.

I was through over fifty separate engagements, including the battle of Colenso and all the fights around the Tugela River leading up to the relief of Ladysmith. I was decorated by His Majesty King Edward VII. with the Distinguished Service Order (D. S. O.) for services performed, and to the best of my knowledge am the only American citizen holding that distinction.

ON PEACE being signed I proceeded home on three months' leave, on the completion of which I returned to South Africa and opened a hotel in Johannesburg, but soon tiring of this, I obtained an appointment in the Criminal Investigation Department of the Government Railways as Sub-Inspector. I kept this appointment for over a year, when I was offered a place as Adjutant of the British Contingent with the company that brought General Piet Cronje and others to St. Louis for the Exposition and reproduced some of the battles.

At the end of the Exposition I was offered an appointment by the President of Guatemala, and proceeded to New Orleans with about forty veterans en route for that country. While waiting for a steamer at New Orleans, I was arrested and taken before the Federal Grand Jury on the charge of filibustering, which could not be proved, and we were allowed to proceed.

I spent about a year in Guatemala, holding various positions under that Government. While there I contracted yellow fever, so now trust that I am to a certain extent immune.

I RETURNED to New Orleans and thence to Vermont, where I remained for some months. I then sailed from Boston for England, and on arrival there the English Colonial Office appointed me Assistant Commissioner of Police on the Gold Coast, West Africa. This appointment also carried the posts of Superintendent of Prisons and Sheriff. During the five years I held this position I enjoyed the best of health and was never ill for a moment. This in itself, I believe, is a record for West Africa.

Last year I threw up my appointment and came to British Columbia and started in the real-estate business, which act I sincerely regret. I was not cut out for this kind of work and want to get something else to do. Anything under the sun that is offered me with good inducements I will accept, no matter how dangerous or what the hardships may be. I am a good organizer, have a Distinguished Certificate for Drill, know machine-guns, police work, finger-print system, and in fact can turn my hand to most anything. If you know of any parties who could use my services and will put me in communication with them, I will be grateful.

Very truly yours, No. 9.

WANTS position on regular salary with chance of travel and adventure. Unmarried, young. "I might describe myself as a 'caged Restless Spirit,' as I have others dependent on me and so have never been able to do any adventuring."

Very truly yours, No. 10.

"AMAZON CHARLIE" writes that he has now secured all the recruits he wishes for his expedition to the Amazon country and asks that no more applications be sent in.

WANTS any venture that will bring excitement and have need of his trained services. "I am a physician and surgeon and, while fifty years of age, as young as I ever was." Two years in Siam as medical missionary, and in charge of local native hospital system of Bangkok.

No. 11. WILLIAM R. LEE, M.D.

"CAN you put me in communication with any party who is in need of a good reliable man? . . . . Would prefer employment in South America or the West Indies." Has served four and a half years in U. S. navy, being honorably discharged as Gunner's Mate, second class; punched cattle in Texas and Oklahoma; telegraph lineman; traveling salesman for electric house; slight experience as aviator; considerable knowledge of navigation; mechanic in garage. References furnished. No. 12.

HAS been all over the U. S., Canada and Mexico. Served with Madero. Twenty-four years old. Crack shot with rifle or pistol. "I am an adventurer and will go any place and do anything that is straight, and don't care two steers for my life." Wants to join some expedition where there would be a little excitement.

(No. 13) C. A. R., Vernon, B. C., Canada.

WANTS two men to go to Brazil with him. Has been in Amazon country and South America generally, Alaska, etc. Fought under Gen. Mosby in Mexico. Has clue to gold from man who lived three years with the "white Indians." "He never could tell just where they were after he came out, but had a good idea of the way back, which he told me." Candidates should have some capital.

No. 14.

DURING the two years and a half since the magazine was started I can not recall a single instance of our having published a letter or part of a letter to whose publication the writer objected. When in doubt, we write for permission. But that takes time and a little trouble at both ends of the line. Also, even with best intentions, all of us are subject to mistakes. For your own sake as well as ours, please do this: *Whenever you write to me or the magazine, say so very definitely if you do not wish your name or any part of your letter printed.* It will remove all doubt and help me a good deal if, in case you do not object to publication, you will add the words "Free to use" or "Free to publish."

Incidentally, if you write something that

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would interest your comrades of the Camp-Fire, don't prevent their hearing it unless there are very strong reasons. Each of us should be willing, through good-fellowship, to contribute his share to the entertainment of all.

HERE we are on the big-snake question again. Also some other very interesting matters.

I am somewhat of a traveler myself, having spent fourteen years in South America, mostly on the Beni and Madre de Dios district.

As to snakes, I have shot a socooro or boa on the Plains of Mojos, 20 leagues east of Trinidad, that measured thirty-one feet nine and a half inches, and he was some snake. I have heard stories told by the Mohima Indians about snakes being forty and fifty feet long. Do not doubt but what Mr. Lange will find plenty of evidence to show that somewhat bigger snakes exist than have been known up to the present time.

I wish I could pull myself together and write stories, as I have a whole fund of anecdotes of my fourteen years' experience in Bolivia, Brazil, Argentine and Chile. And I think that I am one of the few men who have made the journey by himself, from La Paz to Barrenabague on mule and *balsa* (native raft). Barrenabague is on the Upper Beni River, 130 leagues east of La Paz and the Great Mountains. I went by way of Pata-camayo Zica Zica and over the mountains through towns where they had never seen an Americano, and happened to arrive at a town on one of the rivers that flow into the Bopi above Cañamona, in time to see a Sun Dance, danced by the Imyra Indians. Then they had the pleasure of driving a *gringo* out of town, and I think if it had not been for a Franciscan monk, I would not have been here to tell the tale.

We, that is to say, my partner and I, have tramped through the forest from Barrenabague to Ixiamces across the Madidi district into the Heath and then by canoe down into the Madre de Dios and on to Biberalta on the Beni, coming through the district of the Guaryo Indians, a brave tribe who shoot on sight at any stranger, with their bows and poisoned arrows.

My occupation is that of a civil engineer, and am at present thinking of going south to Mexico. If you see fit to publish this, please do not mention my name, as there are people who would like to know my whereabouts and it would not be exactly healthy for me if they knew this.

I wish you success with your enterprise and hope the Camp-Fire will have many more friends.

Yours respectfully, —— ——

WITH Adventurers' Clubs already established in New York and Chicago and under way in several other cities, it looks as if the movement were going to spread all over the map. I feel some reticence in talking about it, since the club is in no way connected with this or any other magazine and I have no more voice in its affairs than any other member, but anything pertaining to adventure and adventurers is of particular interest to the Camp-Fire and I know the club stands ready to welcome new members and comrade clubs in other places.

You already know the sole purpose of the order is the fellowship of congenial spirits and the interchange of ideas and reminiscences among those who have known the *Wanderlust*, and that expense and formality are neither necessary nor desired.

If you have known adventure, get together a few kindred spirits in your own town, send in your application, hold your first dinner and see whether the idea isn't greeted with the same pleasure and enthusiasm as in Chicago and New York.

Here is the chart or by-laws drawn up by the executive committee of the Adventurers' Club of New York. Some modifications may be made before final adoption and after consultation with the Adventurers' Club of Chicago, but the part bearing on admission of clubs in other cities is likely to remain about as it stands.

The Chicago acting secretary is Capt. W. Robert Foran, 902 Marquette Building, Chicago, Illinois; the New York acting secretary is Stephen Allen Reynolds, 423 East Sixty-fourth Street, New York City.

1. NAME. Adventurers' Club of New York.

2. MEMBERSHIP. Limited to 100. Any congenial adventurer is eligible.

3. ELECTION. Candidate for membership must fill in one of our record-blanks (marking anything he pleases as confidential), giving name, address, experiences on which rest his claim to being an adventurer, etc.; have one member sign as his proposer, another as seconder; hand it to the Secretary at a Club dinner. The two members vouching for him are responsible for the genuineness of his claims and for his conduct as a member. After sufficient time for members to meet candidates at a dinner, a paper with names of all candidates shall be passed to each member present by the Secretary; each member marks after each name a cross for an affirmative, or a circle for a negative. Three negatives debar a candidate from membership. The filled-in record-blanks of candidates shall either be read to the Club by the Secretary or passed to each member with the ballot. Result of ballot is ascertained, but not announced, by the Secretary and Committee. Those elected will receive an invitation to the next dinner; the others will not.

4. DUES. No dues or initiation fee. A levy, not to exceed twenty cents, may be included in charge for a dinner by the Secretary with sanction of the Committee, to defray Secretary's expenses for postage, stationery, etc.

5. OFFICERS. A Secretary, acting also as treasurer; Secretary to choose first and second assistant

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secretaries, to act only in absence of Secretary or at his request; an executive Committee of five, including the Secretary. To be elected and hold office according to a majority vote of the Club.

6. QUORUM. A quorum shall be fifteen members at any dinner or gathering for which invitations have been sent by the Secretary to all members.

7. DUTIES OF OFFICERS. Secretary shall keep all records, including the brief records sent by Adventurers' Clubs in other cities; arrange for dinners; have charge of and be responsible for the Club's small finances; such other duties as herein set forth. Secretary may at any time deputize any members to assist him. The Committee shall have jurisdiction on all matters pertaining to the Club, and on admission of the Adventurers' Clubs in other cities. Committee is at all times subject to a majority vote of the Club.

8. DINNERS. Once a month at 6:30 on the third Saturday of each month, except during the Summer; at a fixed place chosen by the Committee. This fixed place to be our headquarters every evening in the year, and to reserve a corner for such members as may drop in. Total charge for dinner, tips and assessments not to exceed $2.00 per plate, to be paid to Secretary immediately upon arriving at dinner. Evening dress permitted but not desired.

9. NOTICE OF DINNERS. Obligatory upon every member, on receiving notice of a dinner, to reply at once stating whether he will or will not be present. Failing to do so twice in succession, or unexcused absence from four consecutive dinners, automatically drops him from membership, subject to reinstatement by Committee on adequate excuse.

Members accepting but not attending are liable for the full cost of their plates.

10. TOASTMASTER. A toastmaster and an alternate shall be chosen at each dinner for the next, and the toastmaster shall arrange in advance, subject to approval of Committee, for a brief informal program for the dinner at which he is to preside.

11. LENGTH OF SPEECHES. The Club insists on absolute protection against the boredom of long speeches. The toastmaster is *obliged* to rap down any speaker at the end of ten minutes, having given a preliminary rap one minute in advance. The Club may, *in advance*, vote to allow a longer period to any speaker, subject to the toastmaster's rap at the end of that period. The Club, after the toastmaster's rap, may vote to allow an additional period to any speaker.

12. CONVERSATION. The toastmaster will allow plentiful intervals for general conversation, but while a speaker has the floor all other members will refrain from conversation.

13. SPEAKING OPTIONAL. No member is expected to speak unless he feels like it.

14. TABOOS. We meet as gentlemen and are opposed to off-color anecdotes and conversation. Members are also expected to use the utmost restraint, consideration and courtesy in touching upon religion, politics and past animosities.

15. Members wishing to bring guests or candidate-guests should notify the Secretary ten days in advance.

16. We, together with our comrade club, the Adventurers' Club of Chicago, welcome to membership in the Adventurers' Club on an equal footing any similar club in any part of the world, so that as brother adventurers we may all find fellowship wherever we go. Provided:

(1.) That they send in to the Secretary of the nearest Adventurers' Club the following application, signed by all their prospective members (at least four), and with a record sheet for each man, giving name, address, and qualifications as an adventurer.

(2.) That, immediately on notification of admission as an Adventurers' Club from above Secretary, they will, for purposes of record in the general order, send to the Secretary of the Adventurers' Club of New York the notice of their admission and the names and addresses of charter members.

(3.) That they subscribe as we do to the following:

A. As a comrade in the order known as the Adventurers' Club we take the name of the Adventurers' Club of ——, having for sole aim the fellowship of congenial spirits who have known the *Wanderlust*, and the general furtherance of the healthy and wholesome spirit of adventure. We will welcome as a guest any worthy member from any other Adventurers' Club, and have a hand for him in any part of the world.

B. We will admit only such members as are real adventurers and of a reputation and character that will not bring disrepute on the general order.

C. We will maintain our Club in a spirit of informality, good-fellowship and wholesomeness as becomes real men who love the big, strong, clean things of life, not those things that are artificial, small and unclean.

D. We will hold our dues and fees to the lowest figure possible, and we undertake to pay none to any other club or to the general order.

E. We will maintain a Secretary whose duty it shall be to keep his name and address registered with the Secretary of the Adventurers' Club of New York for record in the general order, and to send to him on January 1st and July 1st of each year a statement of our total membership at those dates. All Adventurers' Clubs are on an equal footing; reports are made to the New York Club merely that records of the general order may be kept all in one place.

F. In case we receive an application for membership as a club in the general order from another place, accompanied by the record-sheet of each man, we will pass carefully and promptly upon their petition, and, unless we have sound evidence of their unworthiness, notify them of their admission and send similar notice to the Secretary of the Adventurers' Club of New York, giving place, number of applicants and date of admission.

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A CLEAN TOOTH NEVER DECAYS
THE WORLD'S STANDARD TOOTH BRUSH. PRESERVES THE TEETH.
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THE BRISTLES FIT THE TEETH AND CLEAN BETWEEN THE TEETH WHERE DECAY STARTS
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